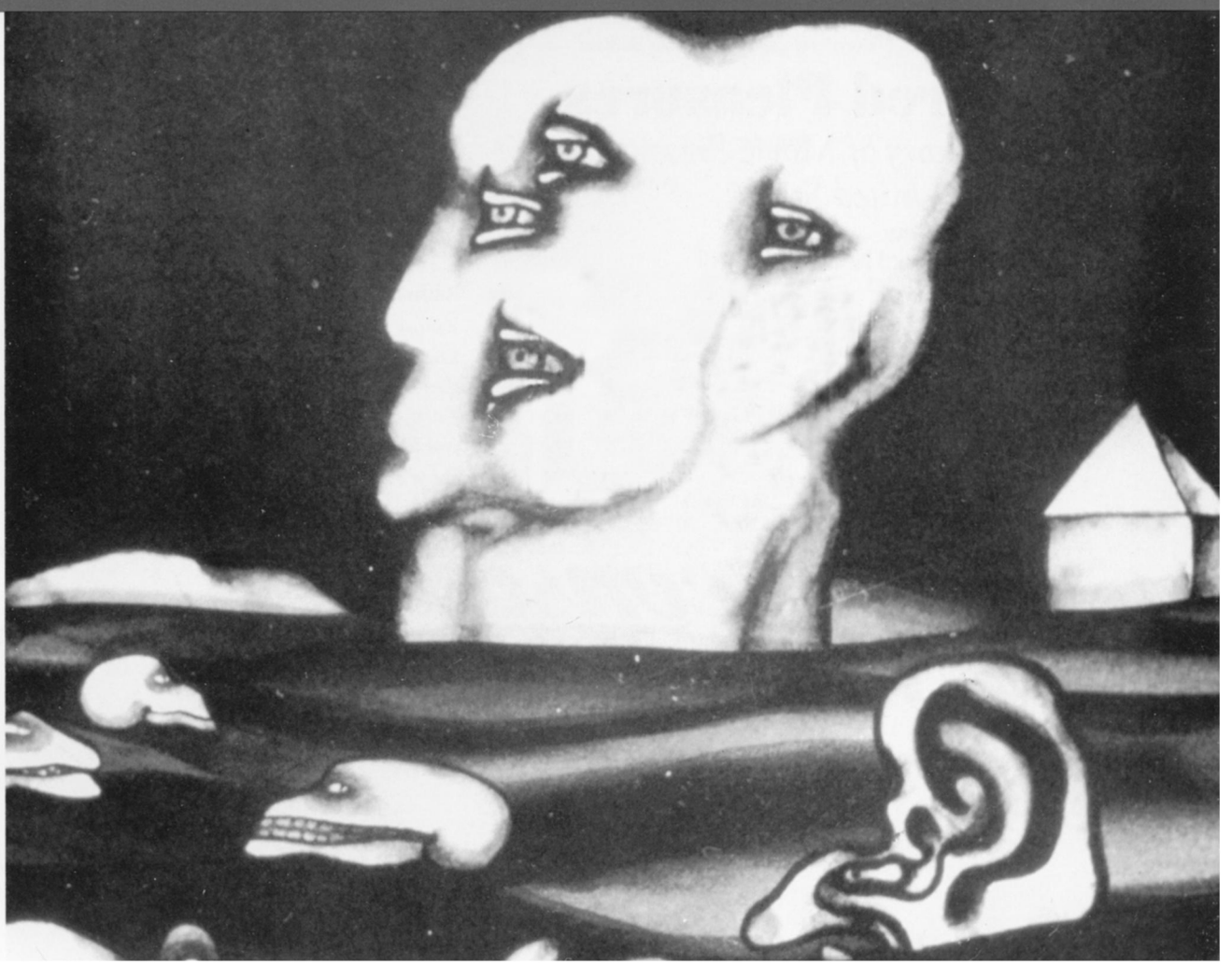
Film Quarterly

Volume 45
Number 4
Summer 1992

Jan Lenica and the *Landscape* of Poland •

All the Vermeers in New York • *Bugsy* •

Annual (Bigger-Than-Ever) Book Roundup •



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Cover: (top) Vermeer's *Portrait of a Young Woman* from Jon Jost's *All the Vermeers in New York* (see page 17); (bottom) The monumental Observer: detail from a poster for Jan Lenica's *Landscape* (see page 2).

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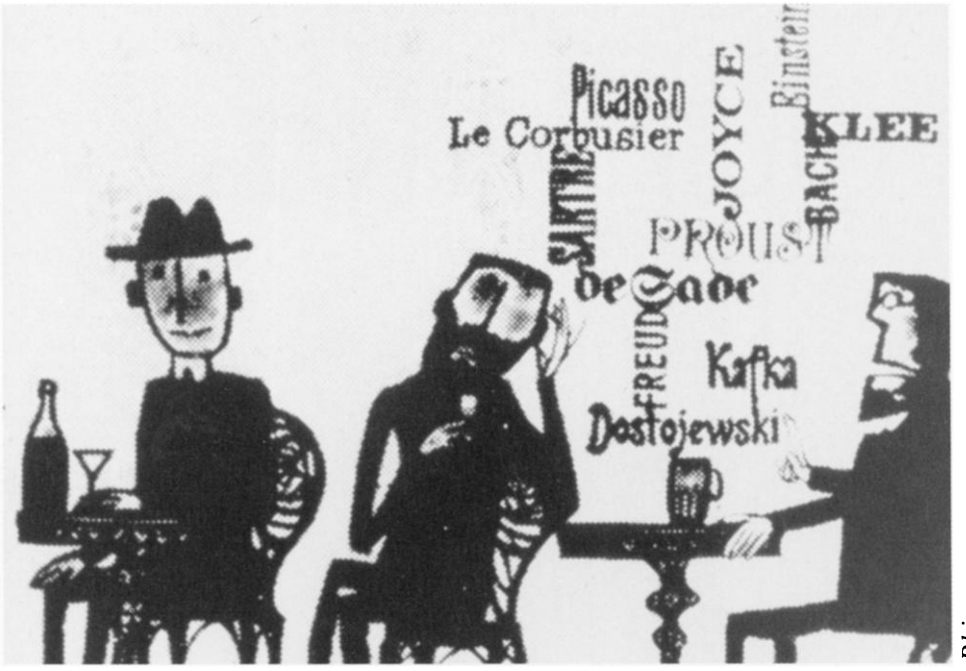
Steve Weiner



Rhinoceros

Jan Lenica and *Landscape*

With the collapse of Communism, formerly state-supported animation studios in eastern Europe are under pressure to make films that are commercially viable. In the West, commercial and tax-supported animated films are very much in production but, culturally unrooted from history, they rarely attain the complexity of the East European graphic artists and puppeteers who redefined the animated film after World War II. If the animated film progresses as an art form with emotional depth and significant, rather than idiosyncratic, imagery, its new directors will owe much to the example of such extremely independent animators as Jan Lenica.

Jan Lenica, born in Poznań, Poland, in 1928, now teaching poster design in Berlin, was one of the most formative directors of animation. During his most influential years, the late 1950s and early 1960s, he was instrumental in introducing sophisticated graphic design into the animated film. His parables of men caught, bewildered, and destroyed by conformity, authority, and anxiety raised the status of the form. His best films merged a subtle intellectuality with variations on the theme of revolt and were consistently awarded festival prizes and international respect. His career reflected the realities of film production in both Communist Europe and the West that first shaped, then deformed his art.

Landscape (1974), made at the Carpenter Center, Harvard, best shows his resilience. This eight-minute film, together with *Labyrinth* (1962) and parts of *Adam II* (1968) was, he said, his favorite. It was his most private film, the most complex,

and, psychologically, the most dangerous. It was the first time, after nearly 30 years as a graphic artist and film-maker, that he referred to his experiences of the war and its aftermath.

Poland before the war was an old culture in a backward country, living years behind the rest of Europe. Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań, and Silesia were developed, but by foreign capital. There was not one cosmopolitan city. Warsaw's café society was an endless parade of witticisms and scandals, rooted in the nineteenth century, old architecture on the Vistula River, mockery against the Church and the eternal peasantry. A century of foreign domination had created pessimism, defeatism, an almost morbid depression. Polish artistic circles have been described as "a study in decay, madness, dissonant, erotic perversion, false conversions to Catholicism, complex psychopathic personalities . . . decadence, an atmosphere of senselessness."[1]

Poland was also an unstable country, ravaged by strikes, hyperinflation, street fighting, massive shortages in food and housing, unemployment, and unstable currencies. The country was threatened on both sides by aggressive regimes: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany. Despite these tensions the Lenica home appears to have been warm and secure, largely because of the positive character of Alfred Lenica, a violinist for the Poznań Municipal Orchestra. Jan Lenica remembers the climate of his father's home as that which formed his own artistic personality.[2] He recalls enjoying the Munich satirical weekly *Simplicissimus*, for example, especially the caricatures by George Grosz, and his father, an amateur painter, working on "Lenica-Légers, Lenica-Modiglianis, Lenica-Klees."[3]

When the Germans invaded in 1939 the Lenica family was exiled by the Nazis to Mielec, a peasant village in southern Poland. It was a bitter, lonely experience. Lenica worked in an office and his father played in the Mielec orchestra, where, curiously, he met a surrealist painter, also a musician, and began his own career as a serious painter.

After the war nearly all the major Polish cities were in ruins; from the air Warsaw was a series of white roads radiating through black rubble. Poland had lost a fifth of its population and had been the site of some of the worst Nazi extermination camps, such as Auschwitz. Entire minority cultures were nearly erased from existence. Civil war raged between Polish Communist and Polish nationalist soldiers. The country swarmed with millions of émigrés, soldiers, and refugees. Surviving pro-German *Volkdeutsche* (Poles who had cashed in on German ancestry to gain favors from the Nazis) preyed on them all.[4]

The Lenica family moved close to Łódź, the temporary capital, in 1945. Prices were out of control but Lenica, still a teenager, earned good money drawing cartoons. The clubs were open, vodka flowed, intellectual debates and music lasted all night. Artists and writers were "thrilled in this convulsion of history. It was a time of deep meaning, a heroic time, a very romantic time . . . [concerned with] problems of survival itself." Many Poles of Lenica's generation prided themselves, in a perverse way, on having experienced the catastrophe. And many of the writers and artists in Łódź after the war among whom Lenica made his first adult friendships detested and savagely ridiculed the values of old Poland: heroism, chivalry, and nationalism, Poland's "holy martyrdom" in bearing witness to Europe's perfidy—all remnant ideals of an impoverished aristocracy; they also attacked the cheap pessimism and frivolous wit of café society, shown to have been grotesquely obsolete against the mechanized Nazi war machine.[5]

Tadeusz Konwicki, a Lithuanian, now one of Poland's leading novelists, became Lenica's first close friend and then his brother-in-law. Tadeusz Borowski, also a writer, was a strong influence. Borowski's prose was laconic, almost lyrical, but always on the verge of exploding with rage. Only in his twenties, he had survived both Auschwitz and Dachau. His black irony, characteristic of many of the younger Poles, is shown by the title of a collection of short stories published shortly after the war, *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. Borowski became the literary focus of reconstructed Warsaw and for a time he and Lenica were inseparable. It is possible that Lenica's drawing of the mid-1950s, *The Man with Dangerous Thoughts*, a man with a bird cage of angry red ravens for a head, is a portrait of Borowski's (or even Lenica's) dangerous talent.

Caricaturists who had survived the war, serious graphic artists and professional funny men both, gravitated around *Szpilki*, a prewar leftist humor magazine, revived at first in Łódź. Lenica's drawings were instantly singled out for "his spe-

cial talent,"[6] his "subtlety of a high class,"[7] and his "special place by virtue of his unique style."[8] The youthful verve, delicacy, and mordant wit that made him different can be appreciated now only in the context of those heavy-hearted postwar years: a man gazes wistfully down at his detached feet in the grass he has just scythed;[9] the subtly unsettling *Upał*,[10] in which a monstrous sunflower hangs its head over a dwarfed city; boistrous crowds of young literati in a crowded café.[11] Youth, humor, the scene, were Lenica's themes, rendered in line. He turned his back on the tensions of prewar Poland, the war, and the intense dislocations of Polish society.

Lenica became an enfant terrible of caricature; his drawings appeared in the Communist newspaper *Trybuna Ludu* as well, and the cultural journals *Odrodzenie* and *Nowa Kultura*. He illustrated leftist or avant-garde poets such as Gałczyński, Ruszczynski, and Szpierbykowski, and gained confidence: *Hyena*, a drawing in boldly brushed dry black ink, shows a jackal on a Jewish tombstone to illustrate a poem about anti-Semitic acts in Poland in 1948.

Lenica's political cartoons were at first gently linear. They predicted the demise of café society by advancing socialism,[12] attacked the U.S. veto over Communist China's admission to the United Nations,[13] or mocked French Surrealism,[14] which was, according to Stalinist dogma, decadent if not perverted. Nevertheless, he experimented with modern art. In 1948, in Lenica's first exhibition, *A Young Boy in the Large City* depicts an ugly boy in a melancholy urban slum, much like Grosz. Other drawings show abstract interpenetrating shapes, one a tangle of line, a "psychic gesture."[15] He toyed with mock woodcut style[16] and paper collage.[17] He learned from Daumier, Picasso, Steinberg.

Lenica "kept an open eye" on the Stalinist administrators, but he was also, in his own words, "a true believer." He was young, taken in, and believed completely in militant, international Stalinism. The unresolvable dilemma was that the mystique of Stalinism, based on the exhilaration of hatred against external enemies and the promise of greatness in the future, inspired Lenica and others to be "great artists." Yet Stalinism also prohibited modern art and cut off artists from the West, where modern art had been born and continued to develop. This "schizophrenia . . . the new [socialist] phase and the old phase exist[ing] simultaneously . . ."[18] was characteristic of many young Poles after the war.

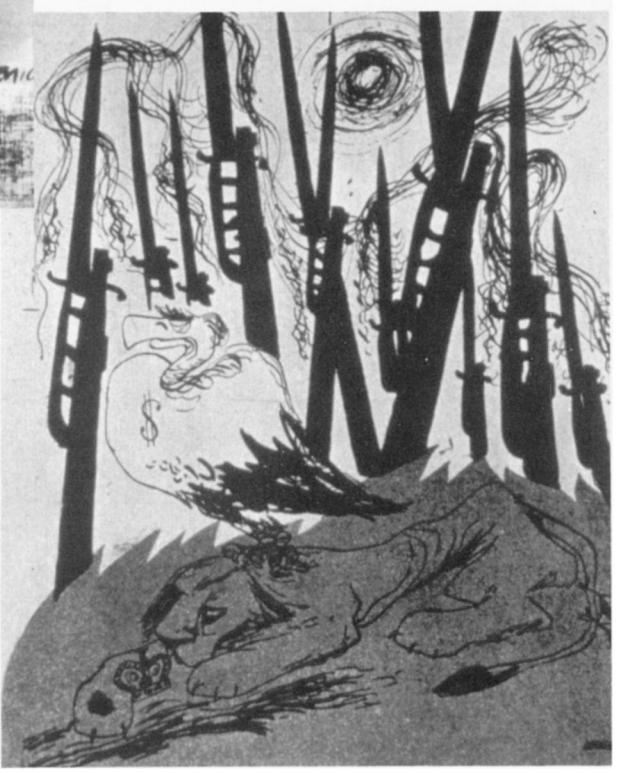
The Soviet Union gained complete control over Poland and every area of Polish life in 1947. The Cold War became intense. Lenica's political cartoons grew violent, filled with drama. The heavy brushed ink drawing *The General's Adviser* shows Death whispering to his intimate, General Eisenhower. *Death of the King of the Jungle* shows a debilitated British lion enslaved to the U.S. dollar, a vulture, in a murky, morbid forest of bayonets.[19] The violent dry brushed ink style comes from the rich heritage of interwar leftist graphic art.

To the Polish intelligentsia, Stalinism was seductive and obsessively oppressive in a way the Nazi occupation had never been. Poland had had a long history of love-hate relationship with Russia, being a rival Slav nation; now Stalin used artists and writers throughout East Europe to promote abstractions that falsified emotion, ruptured social relationships, and shut off access to fact. Talent was deformed, even destroyed: Tadeusz Borowski wrote Stalinist propaganda, became entangled in a bad relationship, and, in 1951, committed suicide.

During the Cold War, Polish society congealed into paranoid, isolated fragments. Lenica, a Young Communist, and the other political activists among the graphic artists were shunned by many older artists, who refused to cooperate in any way with the Stalinists. Even so, within the ranks of the activists, Lenica and many of his colleagues fought for expressive privileges in art, often skillfully, on the grounds of being "romantic revolutionaries." But artists were "cut off . . . [with] no possibility for art or literature to grow from the realities of life. You will find, again and again, in this period, artists and writers who describe themselves as crippled, mutilated, grown stunted."[20]

Stalin died in 1953, and for the next three years the Soviet political machinery drifted. In Poland the Stalinist administration slowly lost control. Artists and writers seized the initiative by publishing forbidden works and organizing exhibits. Lenica figured significantly in exhibitions of modern Polish graphic art, including a major event at Warsaw's Arsenal in 1955 that repudiated Stalin's mandatory pseudo-naturalism, "social realism."

Lenica's political cartoons: *The General's Adviser* (left) and *Death of the King of the Jungle* (below)



Lenica's new styles for *Świat* magazine were improvised designs, some highly whimsical, even sentimental, using, for example, old valentines, or bold, geometric shapes of paper to satirize a general with a chestful of medals. But politics disappeared.

In 1956 riots in Poznań led to the threat of outright Soviet military invasion. At the last minute Khrushchev backed down. Gomułka was hauled from jail to become Prime Minister of Poland, and euphoria reigned. All through Polish society there was a reorganization of the arts, especially in the state-financed cinema industry.

Before the war there had been no animation in Poland, no puppet film, no mime. There had been primitive efforts, but experimental film had been made by only a very few and isolated artists, such as the Themersons. Cartoons were mostly imported, for instance, Disney's *Snow White*, with whose heroine Lenica had fallen in love as a boy in Poznań. In 1947 the Featurette Film Studio tried to raise animation production from a "garret craftman's scale."[21] The Bielsko-Biała Studio made children's films in flat Disney color and tedious Soviet tempo. The few postwar experimental films were made by painters like Tadeusz Kantor or the designer Pawłowski.

Animation expanded, as did all cinema production after 1956, with studios now staffed by the first graduates of the fine arts academies and the Łódź Film School, established or reestablished after the war. New styles, new techniques, and serious music by composers such as Krzysztof Penderecki developed the animated film as a serious graphic art. But the reknowned Polish animated film, the "minimal" black humor gags of Miroslav Kijowicz and Daniel Szczechura, the brooding, pessimistic dramas of Ryszard Czekała, the dark, finely crafted metaphysical works of Jerzy Kuczia and Piotr Dumała, the surreal tableaux of Piotr Kammler in France, came after, not before, Lenica and Walerian Borowczyk.

Lenica began making animated films with Borowczyk, a lithographer and poster designer from the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts, because of ambitions in film, not animation per se. Experimental film in the mid-1950s, in Poland as in the West, was an entrée for ambitious talents. In 1957 Lenica and Borowczyk persuaded Jerzy Kawalorowicz, director of the film group Kadr, to let them use its rostrum camera and cameraman Nurżyński to make an improvised film. *Był Sobie Raz (Once upon a Time)* was an "intelligent joke" with a paper bird that metamorphosed among fin-de-siècle matrons and sculptures cavorting through a landscape drawn by Lenica's three-year-old niece.

They then made *Nagrodzone Uczucie* (*Rewarded Sentiment*, 1958), an affectionate satire of a Polish naïve artist, using the paintings under the rostrum camera to tell a tale of requited love. Their third film, *Dom* (*House*, 1958), a film of bizarre events in a bourgeois house (also produced by Kadr), won the Brussels World's Fair Experimental Film Competition in 1958 and launched their European careers. Lenica then worked solo in Paris, Warsaw, and Munich on the films which established his reputation: *Monsieur Tête* (1959), *Nowy Janko Muzykant* (1960), *Labyrinth* (1962), *Rhinoceros* (1963), *A* (1964), and *Adam II* (1968).

False naïveté in figurative style operated in Lenica's films, developed from prior European avant-gardes of painting: Dada torn-paper figures in *Był Sobie Raz* and *Monsieur Tête*; Max Ernst's collage novels in *Labyrinth*; Secession in *Rhinoceros*; German Expressionist woodcuts (in an interior blown up from an illustration by Poyet) in *A*. An Everyman style for the hero of *Adam II* was deadpan, smooth, and almost featureless, mimed a bit like Buster Keaton. The tactic of naïve simplicity of style makes any civilization look bizarre.[22] Even the Lowicz peasant costumes in *Nowy Janko Muzykant*, though not an original style, travestied Henryk Sienkiewicz's tale of alleged latent talent among the peasantry.

Lenica's mordant humor was increasingly balanced by decoration, sometimes delicacy. His reputation for pessimism came less from the depiction of the melancholy of Polish life than by comparison to the "happy excitement," in Disney's phrase, expected of cartoon character comedy. As a graphic artist he was able to "behave like a beast" in the Polish poster and the animated film because they were both underdeveloped, pretty forms. Polish painters and graphic artists had created work far more erotic and morbid than Lenica's: Bronisław Linke, Eugeniusz Markowski, Janusz Przybilski, Franciszek Starowiejski, Jacek Gai, Josef Gielniak, Konstanty Brandel, among many others, with their seas of blood, bodies chewing each other, deformed beings, baroque skulls, grotesque dancers in a dark arena, a disintegrating sanatorium, a sexual *Affreux Baiser*. Bruno Schulz's masochistic prints of the adoration of women and Stanisław Witkiewicz's drug-influenced paintings, made before the war, were also increasingly known and admired after 1956.

But the experimental movement in film, so influential in the late 1950s and early 1960s, became less viable. The feature entertainment film revived, and experimental film, even though it had

(From left) Jan Lenica, Witold Gombrowicz, and Sławomir Mrożek, c. 1962

helped change the grammar of film-making and enlarge the role of the director, had still failed to change cinema from being fundamentally an entertainment commodity. During the consumer boom of the mid-1960s the animated film, slotted into fixed and recognizable genres, circulated through its own regularized festival circuit. East European studios turned out "black humor" gags as predictable as any Hollywood cat-and-mouse cartoon. Lenica's films, funded alternately by subventions in France and Germany or made at the Polish studios, gave him more independence than most studio animators and perhaps a wider experience to draw upon, but he, too, felt increasingly trapped in the conventions of linear parable narrative and the requirement to write scripts that would attract grants from the cultural ministries.

By the time of *Landscape*, in the mid-1970s, Lenica had become isolated in both Poland and in the West. His generation, the "October Spring" elite of Polish writers and artists who had spearheaded the events leading to 1956, split into fragments, pursuing success. They were no longer the "conscience of the nation," as the Polish intelligentsia had traditionally been during political partitions and tyrannies. That role was passing to the workers' movement that eventually became Solidarity and allied itself with the patriotic, conservative Polish Catholic Church.

Lenica, the former Young Communist activist, now successful in the West, created increasingly up-market designs without social reference for wealthy clients like the Olympic Committee and the German Sparkasse Bank. His limited edition silkscreens sold in portfolios along with those of major figures such as Kokoschka and Marinetti, but his surrealism and expressionism, increasingly softened figuratively and psychologically by the coy, curvilinear forms of Secession, looked tame by comparison to painters like Francis Bacon or the next generation's imagery born of drugs, revolt, and extreme artistic postures.

Lenica's paradox was that totalitarianism had bred great emotion: paranoia, exhilaration; and also great struggles—for liberty, truth, modern art. Expression, slipped past the censor, carried profound meaning to a public in deprivation. On the other hand, art in the West meant an endless

competitive treadmill in a vacuum. In *Landscape*, made in 1974 in the West, Lenica reverted to the subtlety that had been necessary in a time of oppression because life, then, under tyranny, had had meaning.

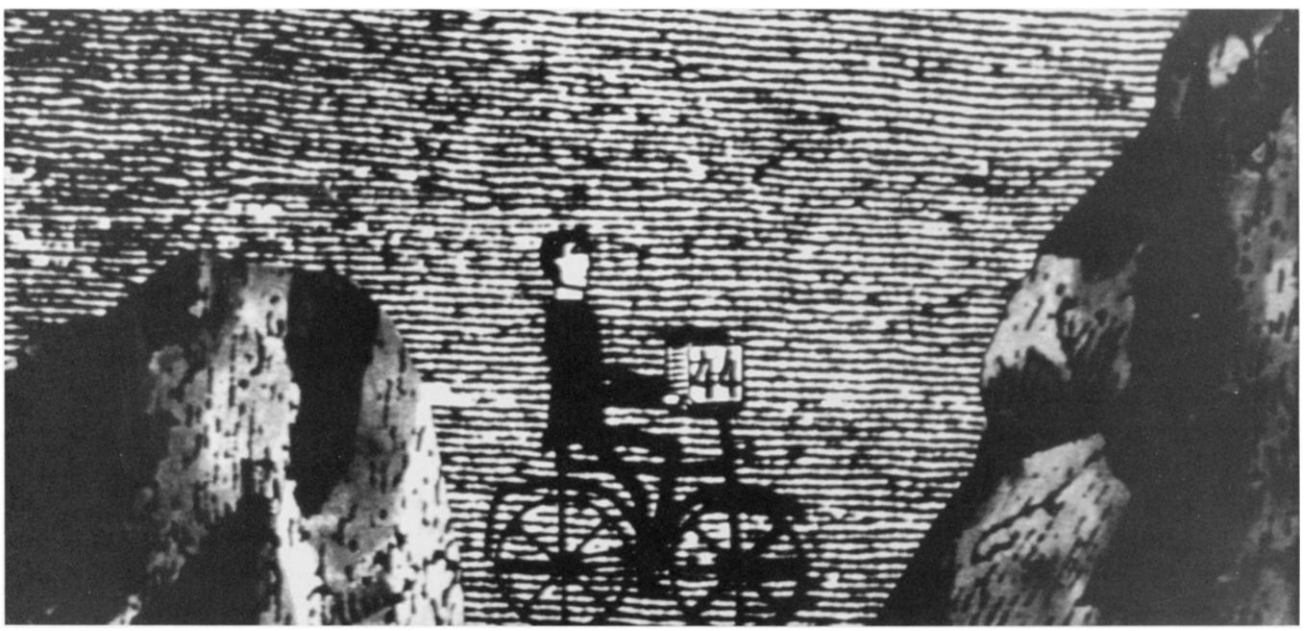
He also became increasingly self-conscious. He saw all his earlier parable films, linear narratives of Everymen who, in different figurative styles, confronted absurdity, as variants of an autobiography, an increasingly difficult effort to break out of the "Polish cultural egg," in Gombrowicz's phrase. Lenica's experience of tyranny gradually inflected his imagination with the Polish obsession of nationalism. Lenica's first films with Walerian Borowczyk, made in a period of euphoria, contained no hint of any obsession at all, except that some saw it in *Dom*'s repeated images of Lydia Borowczyk, listening to, perhaps imagining, possibly obsessed by, the bizarre events in the house. *Monsieur Tête* and *Rhinoceros* were immune from any suggestion of mental compulsion except the threat of conformity. *A*, however, was a "film about obsessions," though the obsessions were depersonalized into letters of the alphabet that tormented a man in a flat.

In *Adam II*, Lenica's feature animated film, the Polish obsession deformed the film. What began as a whimsical and fictional autobiography of an Everyman in Europe turned suddenly Polish at the film's conclusion, when Adam II bicycles for a very long time across a landscape with a box bearing the number 44.

Forty-four was the mystic code for Poland's savior, uttered by an ecstatic priest in prison in *Dziady* (1832), the greatest play by Poland's greatest dramatist, Adam Mickiewicz. *Dziady* had sparked off anti-Russian riots in 1956 and 1968, and was still dangerous; Mickiewicz's statue in Lithuania became a focal point for anti-Russian demonstrations later, during glasnost. Forty-four meant not only Poland's salvation, especially from the Russians, but had acquired the connotation of being *obsessed* with it. When Adam II climbs inside the box and loses himself in an infinite series of corridors, the film ends, having shifted from a theme of generic European alienation into a personal commitment to an identity perceived as an unmanageable labyrinth. But, except to Poles, the Polishness of that identity was indecipherable. For most audiences the point of the film, three years' extraordinary effort, was fumbled.

At the age of forty-five, in *Landscape*, the rebel iconoclast, the enfant terrible, the "angry young man" went deeper into a private and collective past, setting obsessions into play. The boy who once listened in the night for tanks rumbling, whispers, rumors, "listening for the police, fear, . . . lack of freedom," returned, condensed into an ear whose face was contorted into that most Polish of expressions, fear.

Adam II



The film opens:

Projectiles fly under the moon. An Ear crawls out to listen and see. A creature made of bone is seduced by a worm wiggled at him from behind a rock. Flowers grow, also composed of bone. The Ear crawls past a budding stem which suggests an erect male organ.

An inhuman skull lures a second skull by means of an antler and drags it down into the folds of the ground. The predator emerges grinning with the teeth of its victim.

The Ear crawls to two cadaverous figures. They poke out his eyes and kill him.

Much of the Polish school of visual design, posters, and animated films worked with contradictory hybrids, "visual oxymorons." The grotesque and lyrical, for example, are visible at the same time, like an optical illusion. In *Landscape* bones and skulls, although dead, live, even fly. Flowers are made of bone. Outlines are organic, boldly lined in black but softened by washes of blue, green, and magenta. Even the edges of stone obelisks and monuments are softened, chopped and irregular. The pretended naïveté of Lenica's style softens the cruelty. That is a trick of the Polish school, the childlike depiction of the brutal (or the brutal depiction of the childlike), which ensnares the viewer in a network of sly complexities.

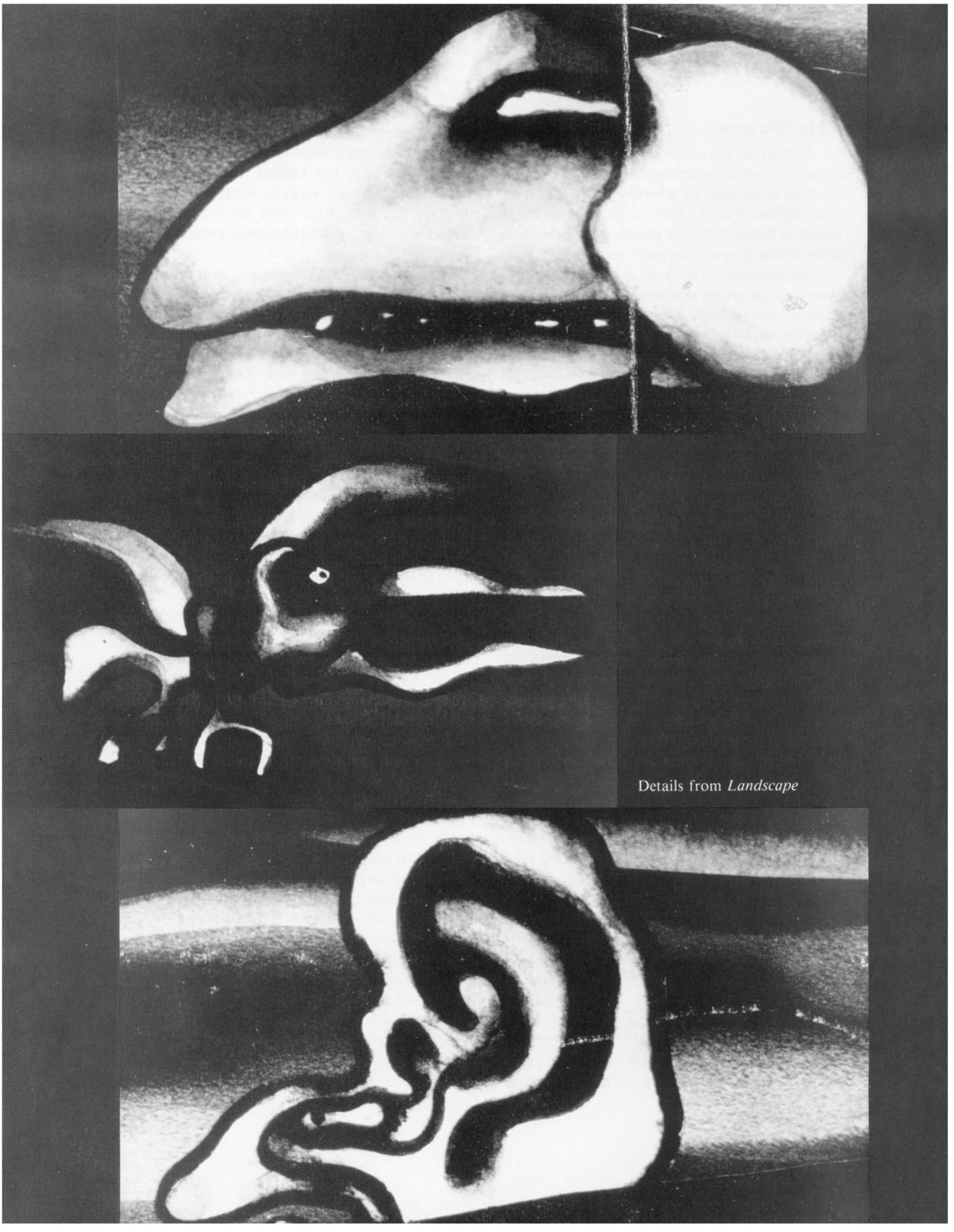
Another trick is the partial obscuring or semi-readability of images: The subconscious, being irrational, enlarges uncannily upon glimpsed images. Flying projectiles move too fast; there is a quick pan to a cliff where nothing happens. "The mind is restless, wants to look back at it for clarification [but] it can be quickly, subconsciously read [only] in the stream of the irrational. The pace determines when the full meaning can be comprehended or not."[23]

Lenica manipulated the paper figures himself under the camera. The figurative motion, like the figurative style, also contradicts the cruelty, makes it seductive. Objects move in very subtle nuances, little phrases, implied contacts. They move by dissolves, phantasmic, slightly incorporeal. Bone leaves drop off *before* a monster chews them. A circle entangled in Art Nouveau tendrils was shot slightly out of focus, making it readable less as paper, more as visible light.[24]

As always, Lenica created the design first, then the movement based on the design. Then he "applied it to the expression of the world." The film was not scripted, but neither was it improvised. Lenica knew exactly what he wanted: it was shot in sequence and there were no outtakes, only meticulous timing adjustments, especially with the sound.

Lenica, trained as a pianist, worked closely with his composers. His film scores had been musique concrète, musical collage, piano, mixtures of Chopin, signs of European modernity. Sound never illustrated action but often preceded it, or was delayed, or reversed, a counterpoint in a dimension of elegant anxiety.[25] With *Landscape*, Lenica gave virtual carte blanche to Garby Leon, a doctoral student in musical composition at Harvard, where Lenica was teaching poster design, the facilities of the Carpenter Center being offered as part of the contract. Leon's immediate background was experimental sound, Zen, and John Cage. Leon's composition, from which the sound score was taken, suggests rending flesh, metallic conflict, and the lyric, frightening solitude of a universe of absolute loneliness.

Sound and music also render the horror poetic. Four kinds of reverberation create a vast, resonant sound universe: acoustic echo, echo chamber, electronic slap echo, and tape delay. Drums, harmonica, pianos prepared with metal, flute, whispers, all played forwards, backwards, at double speed, slowed, at variable speeds, reversed, or with attacks cut from the sound envelopes, suggest intimacy and musicality. Lenica asked that, as in most of his films, there be no synchronized sound. There *is* synchronization, in fact, and at a critical juncture: when the Ear is blinded, bass tones are synched to the killer's jabbing pokes. But the bass tones continue through the cut to become a purely musical bridge into the much different second part of the film, when the mood deepens and evil and transcendence appear. Lenica, always concerned with formal structure, asked Leon for a leitmotif, which became the flute, spare and melancholy. On seeing the rough cut, Lenica further asked that the final, critical image, the monumental head against the rising dawn, keep to the principle that each vignette have its own theme, and Leon inserted a slowed harmonica chord to provide the final revelatory, organlike tones.[26]



Details from *Landscape*

Landscape is a dream, Lenica said, though not one he ever actually had. The progression suggests deepening levels of awareness. Before the main action and secondary credits, nerve-like Art Nouveau tendrils entangle a red pulse that turns blue, beating slower, "like a machine breaking down."[27] After this, the loss of consciousness, comes sleep with its irrational vignettes, its hypnogogic imagery. The film-dream then deepens in the second part to blatant symbols, obelisks into which cadavers are dumped. It ends with the rising dawn, consciousness.

There is, of course, a deeper meaning to *Landscape* than a dream of grotesques on a moonlit landscape.

Jan Lenica was 11 years old when he became part of "the generation contaminated by the war." He saw hanged men and was arrested in a street sweep, and escaped being sent to a concentration camp by the merest fluke. He saw demoralized German soldiers, champagne bottles in their grenade belts. A head of a German soldier by a blown bridge was left unburied in contempt until somebody kicked it into the river.

All Lenica's serious animated films end with the death of an identity. Monsieur Tête loses the features of his face with each award he wins. The hero of *Rhinoceros* conforms by stretching his face into a horn. *A*'s hero, near death on the floor of his flat, is visited by his next tormentor, the letter *B*. *Labyrinth*'s hero falls to his death, wings torn by hideous birds. Adam II is lost in the infinite corridors of his Polish identity. Even Fantorro, the comic hero of turn-of-the-century Paris, dies in a slow cascade of flowers. So, in *Landscape*, coming of age in a time of barbarity ends in blindness and death, but only at the midpoint of the film. Alone among Lenica's films, and quite uncharacteristic of the Polish school, *Landscape* goes on to present a transcendent entity.

The film continues:

Suddenly an Observer, a multi-eyed head, dominates the horizon. Monuments glide into the terrain, bearing geometric shapes, a stone finger. Mutilated figures slowly try to speak. A corpse is hooked upward and dumped into a monument that opens to receive it. Corrosive birds conspire to pluck out the eyes of the Observer. The eyes bleed, but they grow back.

The function of observation, transferred from the dead Ear to a monumental, multi-eyed Head, now dominates the planet. The pace slows. Humor gives way to pain: figures are mutilated, and, dead, do not recover. There are pained human gestures: a figure tries to talk, but is mute. Amorality is gone. Good and evil are suddenly distinct. Instead of vignettes there is now a dramatic conflict: birds try to peck out the eyes of the Observer. Something vastly more serious than black humor gags is being worked out.

The amoral Darwinian universe of projectiles and sexual carnivores in the first part of the film, and now the gliding invasion of monuments in the second, ensures that the symbols of civilization will be seen from a point of view alienated from them. There had been a frenzied profusion of monuments and construction in Poland during Stalin's Five Year Plan, from 1947 to 1951. Poland was always being rebuilt after catastrophes of lost wars. But this reconstruction was different. Stalin's perversions of Marxism-Leninism, his bizarre abstractions, had already been lampooned in *Adam II*: citizens of a totalitarian state bump on square-wheeled bicycles around a cube on a pedestal: the Adoration of the Cube. But *Landscape*'s criticism went deeper than ridicule.

The obelisks and pedestals point directly to art and power, that is, the state. Monuments, as Borowski wrote, were memorials to the death of the slaves who had been forced to build them. That alienation from state and art, the fear and horror of works that are, in spite of their intended meanings, symbols of mass suffering, now permeate the film. The indictment in *Landscape* is murder, but murder and disfigurement of a special kind. Asked if the mutilated figures suggested political prisoners, Lenica replied that if he had been thinking of anyone while creating them it might have been Egon Schiele. Schiele, the exquisitely talented draftsman, it will be recalled, was arrested for pornography and died after imprisonment by the Austrian police.

Stalinism and Nazism were Lenica's experience of tyranny, but *Landscape*'s armless, punctured victims could be Polish, Russian, Argentinian. They are victims. *Landscape*'s subversive universality derives from its address to the irrational, its refusal to be placed historically. The film works by slipping anti-institutional truths past the de-

fenses of the viewer, who, at a deep level, is also deformed by his/her state. *Landscape* is anti-institutional in its message, but also in its method. For if the figures referred to nothing external, the film would be only a theater of brutal and willfully obscure agents, a Polish Punch and Judy under the moonlight. Lenica's film is a phantasmagoria impregnated with subtle politics.

In *Landscape* Lenica went deeper to where "all is allusion."[28] *Landscape* amplified, rather than suppressed, the tendency to dreaminess and vague sensation. French Surrealists had escaped interwar European tensions by creating hermetic enigma as a form of free play, solipsism. Nothing exterior was alluded to and, inwardly, only frequent variations of eroticism. There was nothing to decipher. But Lenica was never a mere surrealist. He was an observer of society. His caricatures, posters, and films were reactions to his place in a changing Europe. And in Poland there was degradation and demoralization. Witold Gombrowicz, the playwright and novelist exiled in Argentina, whose perverse, brilliant diaries became influential in Poland after 1957, pointed out that Poland had precisely its stunted development to offer Europe. The grinning morbidity of much Polish graphic art comes not only from disaster but also from the bold assertion of an immaturity secretly shared by its viewers. Figures in a design sometimes look back as though from a privileged, corrupted terrain, mocking the rank pretension of moral purpose in art. Asked about his connection to the French Surrealists, Lenica said, "It is true that some French Surrealists have seen things in my films which were not really there," then added, angrily, "but the French have a completely different feeling for art. The French were never exterminated."

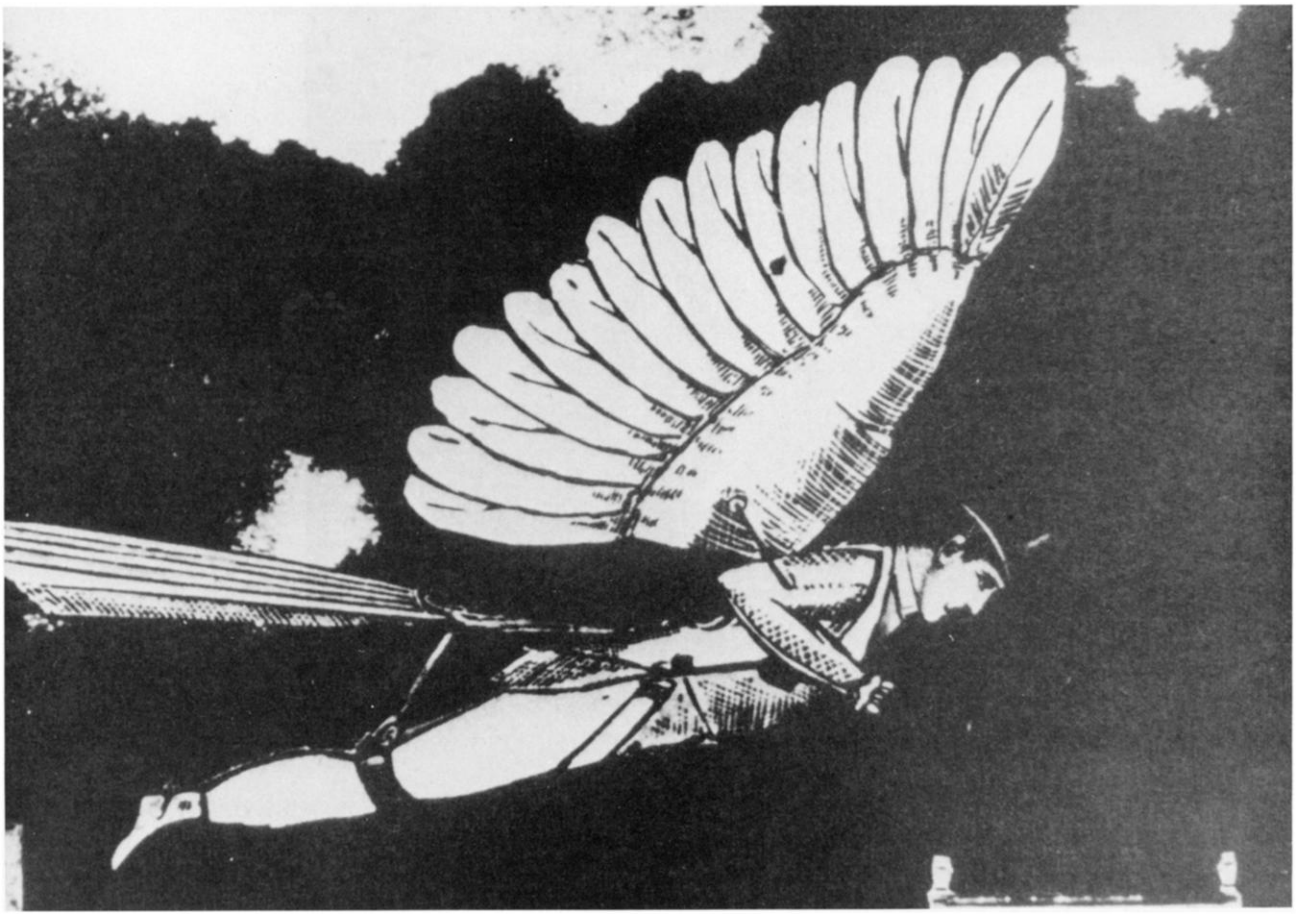
In Lenica's pregnant phrase, an image *is and is not* a metaphor. It is a kind of visual thinking anterior to language, a form of allusiveness, the constructed enigma, the famous Polish school of film poster, animated film, and graphic art which makes decoding both mandatory and impossible. Imagery that *is and is not* is a carefully controlled ambiguity. But there is a worse ambiguity.

Landscape seduces the viewer by being only partly textual. That is, there are half-formed metaphors and blatant symbols that invite a reading but deny answers. There are images that have no meaning at all. Lenica admits he prefers a film with mystery. But in *Landscape* the viewer is drawn into an unexplicated experience and to figure it out, he/she must decipher where the images lie between meaning and nonmeaning.

For example, the bone figures that seduce and ingest each other in the opening vignettes have no exterior referents. They merely exhibit the amoral black humor of the cosmos. The Ear, however, links these vignettes that exist in order to be observed, and is a metaphor for the frightened perceiver, condensed down to the very organs of perception. Then blatant symbols of state power appear. By the end of the film, however, symbols are so private that their meaning can only be guessed. *Landscape*, after all, is more than a disguised political film.

There are other, nonpolitical, idealizations: *A truncated torso on a pedestal.* The torso is fudged to the brink of unreadability. Armless, headless, legless, this body high over the mutilation below suggests love's worship, particularly given the androgynous figuration of victims and the debased inchworm locomotion of the Ear below. *The monuments hold a sphere, a sculpted finger.* Ambitions in art also began during that extraordinary period after the war. These obelisks with sculpted fragments might suggest high art. Militant socialism, love, art: fatal, deforming ideals of youth.

The penultimate vignette shows the moon again. Like Shakespeare's midsummer night's moon, it has called up these caricatures to reenact Lenica's conflicts. *Suddenly the moon elongates, tries to fly, divides in three, and falls as rocks.* In many of Lenica's films, creatures try to fly under the lyric impulse: Monsieur Tête, in love, grows wings; in *Adam II* the man soars over the landscape, garroted by a jumble of female parts hanging from his neck; in *Labyrinth* a walrus somberly climbs a column, tries to fly, and falls to his death; *Labyrinth*'s hero, escaping the erotic boredom and oppression of the metropolis, falls to his death. Lenica's unproduced live-action script, *The 622 Falls of Bungo, or Demonic Woman*, based on the autobiography of Stanisław Witkiewicz (written in 1911 but published in 1972), was about a young man self-destructively in love with an older woman. It ended with Bungo's eye poked out by a branch and (Lenica's invention) a fatal, ludicrous fall off a cliff. Fantorro, the flying hero, is decapitated, his head stuck in a woman's armoir.



Labyrinth

Brought down by love, by the failure of love, these men were not meant to fly.

Landscape is a short and fragile film. It moves quickly. It comes very close, during these private metaphors, to being a "rubble of signifiers." Lenica provide his reverie with structure—a dream progression, musical leitmotif, minimal dramatic conflict—but his allegiance to allusion is extraordinary. The viewer might justifiably feel screened off from the deepest levels of the phantasmagoria. What can be made of icons so dramatically critical, so ephemeral, so deliberately mysterious? Lenica's impulse to reveal is cancelled by his compulsion to disguise. The hybrid of horror and sensuous desire corrupts metaphor because Lenica reattached himself to, as much as revolted against, obsessions that were begun in an epoch of extraordinary intensity. To preserve their value, the components of those metaphors still must not, can not, be disentangled and named.

Disillusionment ends the dream. *A moon rock cracks open one of the pedestals and reveals wormy decay.*

Any artist who works simultaneously with precision of form and vague sensation runs the risk that unintended meanings may leak out from his metaphors. Seductions die hard, if indeed they ever die, and *Landscape*, if it is about anything, is about seduction. For example, the fascination with the mystique of power, which had fueled Lenica's activism, may, at a murky psychoanalytic depth, be partly responsible for the shape of the monumental Observer. In *Archipel R.O.*, an unproduced live-action script of the "existential parable" type, written about 1962, R.O., the Everyman hero, is cast up on an island and eventually lives in an enormous head that dominates the landscape. In one scene, R.O. carries the head's huge ear down the beach, invisible except for his canvas-clad legs, exactly like the inchworm ear of *Landscape*. It is

Jan Lenica (right) with his father Alfred in 1972

not just that Lenica recycled a motif from an earlier project. He said he had visualized a very specific style of *Archipel R.O.*'s monumental head: a huge fascist sculpture by Arno Breker, Hitler's favorite sculptor. Lenica may have distilled the intended charisma of a political icon and inverted it into the head in *Landscape*, preserving adoration but rendering the political power spiritual, the antithesis of tryanny.

There might also be another cause for the anxious reverie that is *Landscape*. Lenica always insisted that his most formative influence was his father. Alfred Lenica became a serious painter after the war (though his mature style—enormous oil canvases of richly colored biomorphic shapes—never resembled Jan Lenica's figurative graphic art) and in many ways their careers were curiously entwined. There was an intimate, profound bond between the two men: Jan Lenica inherited from his father a faith in modern art, and their favorites, Max Ernst, French Surrealists and Polish surrealists, significantly overlapped.

Alfred Lenica was a positive, rarely dejected man, but his frailty was becoming evident in the 1970s. In fact, he died only two years after *Landscape*. Anxiety over such an impending loss can trigger a need in the one left living to make private icons of pain and, by settling old scores, to try to suggest what, if anything, might survive the body—if not religion, not art, and, most bitterly, not socialism.

Alfred and Jan Lenica had both become politically disillusioned. Like many artists before the war, especially those drawn to surrealism, Alfred Lenica had believed in a simultaneous revolution in art and social relations. Alfred Lenica had supported the Communist party even when Moscow demanded an end to Polish nationalism, even when Stalin exterminated the leadership of the Polish party. But after the Communists botched the postwar transformation of Poland, discrediting the only viable political idealism, he became embittered. And when Film Polski refused to distribute *Adam II* in Poland, perhaps because of the Mickiewicz reference, Jan Lenica, after many risks as an activist, after countless battles against the Polish censor, let his party membership lapse.

The Observer, the enormous multi-eyed head, is the core of *Landscape*'s meaning. Most of Lenica's parable films use a strong final image to make an intermittently comic episodic structure ultimately pessimistic: Monsieur Tête's facelessness, the fatal plunge of the hero of *Labyrinth*,

decapitated Fantorro, *A*'s hero facing the letter B, *Adam II*'s infinity of corridors. *Landscape* is nonlinear and moves forward by a succession of new vignettes, but it, too, ends in an image meant to sum up all that has gone before: the Observer, intended victim of the pecking birds, set against the rising dawn, unblindable. A positive image, it pulls the film out of its drugged phantasmagoria. But what kind of supernatural perception is it that lies above the carnage, superior to it? Consciousness? Reason? History? Lenica's private meaning, reluctantly confessed, was Truth. "They try to pluck out its eyes," he said, "but they cannot."

By creating an image of truth and by giving it a political connotation, Lenica nudged up against a famous Polish tradition which, as a member of a left-wing elite, he had avoided all his life.

The nineteenth century had figured in strange ways in Lenica's career. In the mid-1950s, fin-de-siècle elements and clunky nineteenth-century mechanical devices added the charm of kitsch, affection, or humor to his films and designs. Sometimes the incompatibility of the nineteenth century and socialism was the basis of satire, as in *Nowy Janko Muzykant*, in which Łowicz peasants eye sputniks. But as early as *Dom*, a critic noted the "hidden struggle [in Lenica's film] between the aesthetics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries [which creates] a hidden dramatic spine."[29] Through the 1960s the nostalgia and voluptuousness of fin-de-siècle elements, rather than looking like advanced graphic design, began to look increasingly like allegiance to a previous era. For, as Lenica once said, "The nineteenth century is both dead and active."

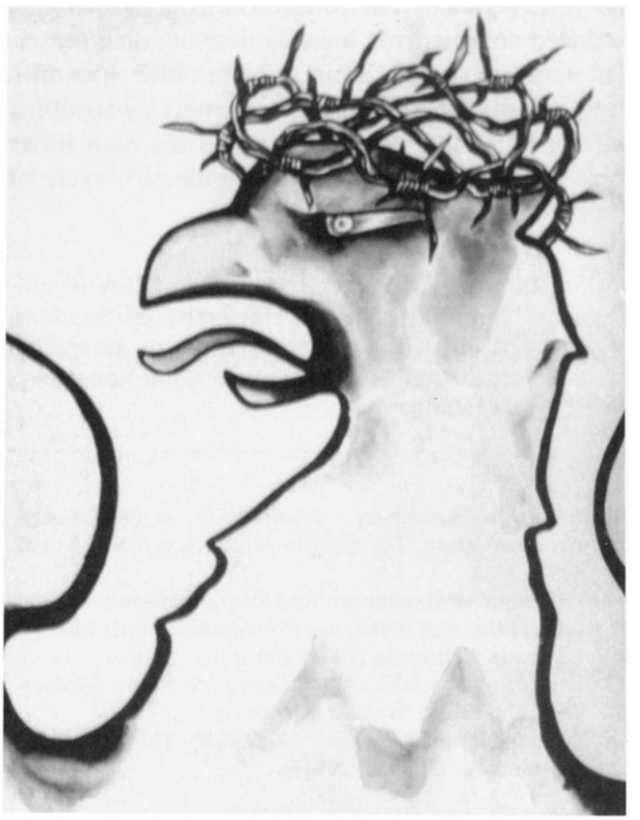
Labyrinth, with its bowler-hatted hero in a metropolis of heavy Secession buildings, was, he maintained, despite its nineteenth-century trappings, a contemporary allegory, partly inspired by Poznań, where the medieval market, narrow alleys, cobblestone streets, and Secession architecture were blackened by the soot of factories. By *Adam II*, however, a giant twentieth-century electromechanical machine is the hero's dinner guest, and it is the modernity of the automaton that makes it alien. The abstracted, enigmatic landscape of Europe that Adam II crosses carrying his Polish identity indicates a modern Europe that he knows he is not part of.

Before *Landscape*, Lenica had been experimenting with a "mystical" version of naïveté in his graphic art. His poster figures and silkscreen forms, undulating lines of neighboring colors or wildly brushed shapes, barely suggested figuration with a burning eye or the death's head. Konwicki teased him about the shift from the precision of his "Prussian" origins in west Poland to the mysterious "Slavic" east.

Juliusz Słowacki, Zygmunt Krasiński, Adam Mickiewicz—the triumvirate of nineteenth-century Polish visionary nationalist poets—exalted to the point of ecstasy the tragedy of partitioned, constantly overrun Poland. In the most extreme form (Mickiewicz's) Poland was the "Christ among the nations." The dreaminess, abnormality, the death-in-life, the beyond-the-grave Walpurgis of visionary political suffering in *Landscape* has, arguably, a touch of the same flavor.

Lenica's early "angry young man" pose, his refusal to deal with Poland's defeat, had to do with escape from a deeply demoralized culture. *Landscape* suggests the depressive magnetism of the Polish wreckage that he finally dredged

Lenica's poster for Solidarity (1981)



up. The debased inchworm body of the Ear, the grinning heads that chew, the amorphous, slow-moving phantasms suggest incapacity. Even the transcendent Observer is armless, legless, immobile, powerless to help. Once again, as in the nineteenth century, exaltation comes out of deep paralysis. Sobriety was again unable to solve Polish problems. Again, ecstasy apotheosized them.

Landscape finally addressed Poland, but a Poland that no longer existed. In some ways it never existed. That Poland was created, sometimes secretly, sometimes obsessively, like a dream, allusive and elusive, in a tradition of a supernatural history countered by Borowski's nihilistic insight into the worthlessness of the murder of Poland's culture.

A poster designed by Lenica after the enforcement of martial law in Poland in 1981 but never printed, was presented to Solidarity. It shows the defiant Polish eagle in the angry brushed black ink style of Lenica's violent political cartoons under Stalinism. The Polish eagle wears a crown of thorns.[30]

It was not that Lenica reverted in *Landscape* to a right-wing nationalism after a lifetime of left-wing avant-garde commitment, but rather that he attacked Russian totalitarianism, which had seduced and betrayed him, by drawing on a powerful national fiction, a messianism older than militant international Communism, and by so doing gave perspective and meaning to his own bitter obsessions, placing them in a collective cycle of painful defeat and regeneration.

▪ Steve Weiner received an MFA in animation from the University of Southern California and worked as an animation cameraman. He is now living in Vancouver, Canada.

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1. Stanisław Witkiewicz's *Insatiability*, as described by Czesław Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (New York: Knopf, 1953), p. 4.
2. All quotations, opinions, and biographical information, unless otherwise noted, are from conversations with Mr. Lenica in California (1974) and Paris (1976).
3. Urszula Czartoryska, *Alfred Lenica Malarstwo* (Warsaw: Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, 1974).
4. Bernard Newman, *Russia's Neighbour—The New Poland* (London: V. Gollancz, 1946).
5. Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (London: Colliers-Macmillan, 1969), p. 445.
6. Jerzy Zaruba in Ignacy Witz and Jerzy Zaruba, eds., *50 Lat Karykatury Polskiej* (Warsaw, 1957). This and all translations from the Polish by Ania Morton-Żuk.
7. Ignacy Witz, "O Karykaturze," in *50 Lat Karykatury*.
8. Jan Białostocki, *Polnische Grafik 1945-1955* (Warsaw: Polonia, 1956).
9. *Szpilki*, Nr. 4 (339), January 11-25, 1948, p. 9.
10. *Szpilki*, Nr. 28 (363), July 4, 1948, p. 10.
11. *Szpilki*, Nr. 20 (355), May 16, 1948, p. 7.
12. *Szpilki*, Nr. 39 (374), September 26, 1948, p. 5.
13. Jan Lenica, Antoni Marianowicz, Jan Szelag, eds., *Polska Karykatura Polityczna* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1950), p. 67.
14. *Szpilki*, Nr. 14 (349), April 4, 1948, p. 6.
15. "Kompozycja" and "Formy" in Marian Bogusz, *Rysunki, Klub Młodych Artystów* (Warsaw, 1948), catalogue to the exhibit, pp. 7, 9.
16. *Szpilki*, Nr. 40 (375), October 3, 1948, p. 3.
17. *Szpilki*, Nr. 43 (378), October 24, 1948, p. 7.
18. Miłosz, *Captive Mind*, p. 22.
19. Jan Lenica, Antoni Marianowicz, eds., *Polska Karykatura Polityczne* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1951).
20. Sławomir Mrożek, conversation, November 17, 1976.
21. Bielsko-Biała Studio information leaflet, 1976.
22. Miłosz, *Captive Mind*, p. xi.
23. A. Krauze, "Lenica," *Wiedza i Życie*, no. 5, 1966, pp. 74-79.
24. Conversation with James Shook, cameraman (October 13, 1986).
25. Interview with K. Nastulanka, *Perspectives Polonaises*, vol. 14, no. 10 (October 1971), pp. 77-84.
26. Conversation with Garby Leon (April 10, 1987).
27. Ibid.
28. Mrożek, November 17, 1976.
29. Ryszard Łasota, "Dom—Filmowej Inicjatywy," a review of *Dom*, 1958 (Mr. Lenica's review file).
30. Rear cover, *The Art of Jan Lenica*, The Polish Museum of America, pamphlet accompanying exhibit, Chicago, May 5-June 17, 1990.

These films are available in the U.S.:

Landscape: Phoenix Films; Kent State University, Audio Visual Services.

Adam II: Phoenix Films; Louisiana Instructional Resources Center, Louisiana State University.

Labyrinth: University of Iowa, Audio Visual Services; University of Michigan, Film and Video Library; University of Illinois, Film Center; McGraw-Hill Films.

A: McGraw-Hill Films; Argos Films; University of Michigan, Film and Video Library; University of New Hampshire, Department of Media Services.

Rhinoceros: University of Colorado, Academic Services; University of New Hampshire, Department of Media Services; Syracuse University, Film Rental Center.

Monsieur Tête: Argos Films; McGraw-Hill Films; University of Michigan, Film and Video Library; Kent State University, Audio Visual Services.

Reviews

All the Vermeers in New York

Director, writer, cinematographer, editor: Jon Jost. Producer: Henry S. Rosenthal. Executive Producer: Lindsay Law. Music: Jon A. English. Produced in association with "American Playhouse." Strand Releasing.

> The space of Vermeer lies dimensionally between the two and the one.
> —Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting*

In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a middle-aged man stares at a younger woman posed in front of a Jan Vermeer portrait.[1] The young woman looks remarkably like the subject of the painting before which she stands transfixed. A series of shots follows. First, the man's face is shown in full on in a close-up, animated by furtive sidelong glances; cut to a framed shot of the woman gazing at the painting, the eyes of its subject staring at us over the top of the woman's head; cut to a long shot from behind of the man watching the woman watching the painting watching us; thus are the separate spaces conjoined.

In this sequence of *All the Vermeers in New York*, film-maker Jon Jost adds a third dimension to Bryson's assessment of the Dutch artist's space —caught between "the two and the one." The film ruptures two-dimensional space and the unidirectional gaze. A voyeur stares at his object of desire. She, in turn, stares at a painting, declaring himself as a subject. The painting subverts its objectification by staring back at her and, more powerfully, back at us. Thus, the viewing subjects of the film become the objects viewed by the highly poised young woman once objectified by Vermeer.

This film by Jost, a 30-year veteran of small-scale independent movie-making, is far more than a meditation upon the space(s) of Vermeer, regardless of the many parallels one can draw between the American film-maker's compositions and the enigmatic painter's style. *Vermeers* is also a narrative about a man and a woman who meet and then part, set in that section of contemporary American society composed in equal proportions of money, art, and spiritual decay. The film tracks the relationship between a young French actress and a middle-aged stockbroker. When Mark (Stephen Lack) sees Anna (Emmanuelle Chaulet) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, he is so taken by her resemblance to Vermeer's aforementioned *Portrait of a Young Woman* that he passes her a note asking her to call him. They have a strained first meeting in a café, where Anna subjects him to an undignified once-over by her roommate, and they become lovers after a fashion. Jost shows us only one intimacy between them: Anna asks Mark for the extraordinary sum of $3,000 to cover the rent on her shared apartment—a strained metaphor for the whorish 1980s.

Anna is one of those legions of New Yorkers in their twenties who are always in the process of becoming something—in her case an actress—but never actually working at it professionally. Mark, unlike Anna, is not living for the promise of the future; he is on the front lines of the war of commerce, having mastered the use of the telephone as a weapon to achieve wealth and power. Yet the endless hours of frenetic telecommunications, what Wall Street refers to as the cycle of "smile and dial, phone and groan," create massive pressures. Mark seeks respite from the stresses attendant upon the life of a stockbroker by immersing himself in the quietude and serenity of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, especially its Vermeer gallery. When he initiates a relationship with Anna, Mark conflates his aesthetic pleasures with his emotional longings.

The emptiness of their interactions is revealed in the baroque twist that concludes the film. After a terrible, perhaps bankrupting, day in his office, Mark retreats to the Met, only to succumb to a brain hemorrhage. His last act before death is to call Anna and pledge his love. In Jost's New York, however, such sentimentality leads only to pathos —Mark pours out his heart not to a woman but to an answering machine. Anna has packed and is about to return to France at the very moment Mark lies dying in the phone booth, blood dripping from his ear.

Stephen Lack
as Mark

The film represents a time and a place that, though current, is already past. And so *Vermeers* doesn't simply render the present; Jost's latest film offers a fullness of insight that usually comes only with historical distance. One cannot, however, approach this film solely with the capitalized noun "History" in hand. Here, history does not stand alone; it is paired with other nouns to form hybrids like "Art History" or "Social History." *All the Vermeers in New York* is thus designed to trigger more than an aesthetic response; instead, the film impels the viewer to keep these "histories" in steady, but oscillating, focus.

Jost is one of the few directors whose oeuvre demands that we resurrect at least some of the party platforms of the *politique des auteurs*. One of his press releases puts it succinctly: "Credits on all films including directing, writing, cinematography, editing, and, where applicable, music composition and performance." Jost's almost three-decade-long career has straddled the usual oppositions: his films are both formal and narrative, highly personal yet politically motivated, improvised but quite obviously blocked-out. Jost has created essentially three different kinds of feature-length films: essays, Westerns, and what I term his "urbans." Not surprisingly, *All the Vermeers in New York* belongs to the third category. Jost has always felt alienated from the formalist abstractions of much avant-garde work, and has felt rebuffed by that community's dismissal of him as merely a narrative film-maker. On the other hand, he has nothing but contempt for studio product, seeing commercial film-making as the entertainment wing of the military-industrial complex. With his latest work, however, Jost is poised to break out of his one-man ghetto. Made with support from the Public Broadcasting Service's "American Playhouse," *Vermeers* will show on public stations around the country this year, and will have theatrical distribution beyond the festival circuit. For those who will first encounter Jost's work on PBS, the film may appear to be somehow sui generis—unlike anything they've seen on television or in a theater. Yet *Vermeers* fits into and results from the whole of Jost's earlier film-making experience. Thus, it is crucial to describe in brief some characteristics of not only the urbans but of the essays and the Westerns as well.

Jost's filmic essays include the much acclaimed *Speaking Directly (Some American Notes)* (1973), which deals with the intersection of the personal and political in relation to American involvement in the Vietnam War,[2] as well as *Stage Fright* (1980–81), and *Plain Talk & Common Sense (Uncommon Senses)* (1986–88). These are his most overtly

politicized films, yet they are also the most lyrical of his works, experimental and fluid in their cinematography, editing, and sound mix.

Last Chants for a Slow Dance (Dead End) (1977), *Slow Moves* (1983), *Bell Diamond* (1985), and *Sure Fire* (1988–90) are among the modern "Westerns," peopled with the human detritus of the contemporary American West.[3] Jost examines the inheritors of the cowboy mythos, left adrift after the closing of the frontier and the exhaustion of its codes of justice, conduct, and independence, and portrays a country where even the false hopes of expansionism, materialism, and individualism are too tired to buoy the populace. Jost's landscapes are wide but barren, his camera accompanying the characters on long and aimless drives through the vast country. In film after film, the only option left to the protagonists is a murderous, defeated rage. All of the Westerns except for *Bell Diamond* end with violence and death: not the cartoonish mayhem of the Hollywood "flying glass" spectaculars, but rather a pointless and soul-damning lashing out.

In the interests of symmetry, *Vermeers* should be an "Eastern," but related films like *Angel City* (1977) and *Chameleon* (1978) are both set in Los Angeles, and *Rembrandt Laughing* (1988) centers around the San Francisco Bay area.[4] Striking a bicoastal compromise, then, *Vermeers* is a Jon Jost urban, importing the lyrical camera work of the essays and the sense of violence inherent in the Westerns. The urbanites do not suffer from exactly the same malaise as the cowboys, but they suffer, nonetheless. The city dwellers have more cultured palliatives for their pain, seeking solace in art rather than in drunk driving and country-and-western music. Yet Jost creates a profound sense of unease as to whether the refuge in "high" culture is any more satisfactory than the escape offered by a shot of good whiskey; one of the major tropes of *Chameleon*, for example, is counterfeiting. The omnipresent links between money and art in *Vermeers* further complicate the urban characters' embrace of an aesthetic ideal.

Art History—the history of art and art's place in history—is obviously central to *All the Vermeers in New York*. Jost makes a pointed comment about the 1980s hypertrophied art market, which mirrored the furious activity in the financial world during the same period. Although Jost chooses not to foreground the historical context of Vermeer's work, it must be remembered that the Netherlands was the site of a radical transformation of capital formation and class structure. The triumph of Dutch commerce saw the ascendance of the bourgeoisie, colonization, and imperialism; one of the great early speculative catastrophes of capitalism came with the disintegration of the wildly inflated market for tulip bulbs. Jost uses historical parallelism to contextualize his critique of contemporary mores and culture. The crash of the New York Stock Exchange in 1987 was hardly the first of capitalism's speculative adventures to fail, nor, Jost implies, will it be the last.

Nothing fuels the consumption of art like new money, however, and New York in the years of the

Emmanuelle Chaulet as Anna

bull market was no exception. *All the Vermeers in New York* opens with a portrait in miniature of the East Village scene. Gracie Mansion, a *nom de commerce*, to be sure, but the name of an actual gallery owner/curator nonetheless, conducts fictional business with an artist demanding a cash advance to feed his junk habit and a collector ravenous to fill out her collection. In the era of postindustrial capital, need becomes an aesthetic category.

This sequence has its tenuous link to the central narrative in the person of Felicity (Grace Phillips), one of Anna's roommates. She works at the front desk of the Gracie Mansion Gallery and is used as yet another indictment of the upper classes in America at the close of this country's imperial century. Felicity is merely a well-drawn caricature: she represents that genus of young, downtown condo-dwellers with solid trust funds and vaporous careers.

Jost contrasts the cash-fueled frenzy of the contemporary art world with the serenity of the Met's Vermeer room. The camera is cruel in its condemnation of the contemporary scene, while lavishing loving attention on the sacrosanct environment that shelters the Dutch masterpieces. Art historian Jon Rupert Martin has commented that Vermeer metamorphoses what he paints "into a jewel-like state transcending mere realism."[5] Jost's romantic vision of the museum similarly aestheticizes the real. But here, the film-maker falls prey to ahistoricism.

Jost establishes no distance between his filmic vision of the Met and his character Mark's idealization of the museum's environment. Mark sees in the space of the Vermeer gallery a direct opposition to the crassness and frenetic pace of his working life. Likewise, Jost films the imposing and richly paneled Metropolitan to contrast with the harsh angles and white-walled galleries of the East Village arts scene. Yet the film-maker never entertains the idea that the space of the Metropolitan Museum of Art could have more than one meaning in the context of this film. The calm and retreat that both Mark and Jost so relish can also be seen as merely the stately pace adopted by another age's nouveaux riches when they could finally convince the rest of the world that they were old money. Jost's privileging of the Met, with its imposing portico, smooth floors, and muted picture galleries, is thus a crucial misstep in his otherwise penetrating visual and narrative analysis.

Vermeers is a record of a society that both thrives on and is devoured by its dualities. Art counteracts the poisoning that striving for wealth engenders, but surplus capital supports the art world. Early capitalism left a breathtaking cultural legacy, but its internal contradictions haunt us still. No life is complete without passion—whether for lovers, artworks, or money—but the violence that is integral to this emotion must be sublimated. The conclusion of *Vermeers* is an inversion of the violence that marks Jost's Westerns. The high pressure of the stockbroker's life is too much for Mark, but the tension manifests itself entirely internally. Mark never expresses his rage—he has neither the chance nor the time.

The interaction between the central characters does not sufficiently express the complexities of their situations because both Mark and Anna are essentially affectless. We learn more about them from their environments than from their actions or dialogue. Jost's eye for the contemporary, for the particulars of the environments in which people live and work, is an outgrowth of his penchant for on-site shooting rather than sound stage or studio work. There is a profound attention to detail in the film—finely rendered assessments of a specific class at a specific moment. In one series of long, slow tracking shots, for example, the camera meticulously records the contents of an apartment's bookshelves and cluttered tables. Two volumes stand out: Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and James Gleick's *Chaos: Making a New Science*. In the late eighties, these two books indeed were ubiquitous in Manhattan's upper-middle-class environs; whether they were being read or not is irrelevant. Whether they were placed on the shelves specifically for the shoot or if they were present when Jost began filming is irrelevant. Their very presence on screen ties the narrative to a broader social and cultural space.

Here context becomes key, forcing another recalibration, encouraging the spectator to concentrate on questions of social history. *Vermeers* does not attempt to write history large. It does not pretend to be a great American saga, nor even a big New York story. Instead it is a visual and aural meditation on two essentially unknowable individuals in a specific place at a specific time.

What saves *All the Vermeers in New York* from mere reportage is its linkages to questions outside this hermeneutic. The social and aesthetic histories of Vermeer's paintings serve to contextualize the dynamics within Jost's film. By opening up the film's critique to other places and other times, Jost escapes the solipsism of other socially conscious critical texts.

The film's concluding shot can be read metaphorically as a reconciliation between past and present. Chancing to get Mark's phone message, Anna returns to the museum, where she finds his body and then runs to "their" Vermeer portrait. The final shot dissolves her into the painting itself, uniting the dimensions, characters, and narrative into a flat presence and present.

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1. Vermeer, also known as Jan Van der Meer van Delft, lived from 1632 to 1675. The painting under discussion has not been dated; it is generally referred to as *Portrait of a Young Woman*.
2. See, for example, David James' discussion of the film in *Allegories of Cinema* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 231-35. It is also worth noting that the personal and the political collided for Jost, the son of a career military man, when he spent two years in prison for draft evasion from 1965-67.
3. Peter Hogue wrote a lengthy review of these films, describing them as "noteworthy as particularly lively counterforces to the classical Western genre's cultural legacy and as fresh, oblique commentaries on 'Westernness.' " "Last Chants and Slow Moves: Jon Jost's 'Westerns,' " *Film Quarterly*, vol. XLI, no. 2 (Winter 1987-88), p. 14.
4. *Slow Moves* was also set in San Francisco, but its themes have more in common with the Westerns.
5. John Rupert Martin, *Baroque* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 226.

[*All the Vermeers in New York* won the 1991 L.A. Film Critics Award for Best Independent Feature and the Caligari Film Prize at the Berlin International Film Festival.]

THE BITTER TEARS OF R. W. FASSBINDER:
QUESTIONS OF GENDER, GENRE,
AND GERMAN HISTORY

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Bugsy

Director: Barry Levinson. Producers: Mark Johnson, Barry Levinson, and Warren Beatty. Script: James Toback. Cinematographer: Allen Daviau. Music: Ennio Morricone. Editor: Stu Linder. TriStar.

The Ben Siegel who dominates Barry Levinson's *Bugsy*, created by the screenwriter James Toback and portrayed by Warren Beatty, the Bugsy Siegel who wooed a Hollywood starlet named Virginia Hill (Annette Bening) and dreamed up the notion of a gambler's paradise in the middle of the Nevada desert is a narcissist, a charmer, a diehard romantic, and a killer. He's also a dizzy visionary—a little like the myopic heroes in screwball comedies who slave blissfully away at inventions no one else seems to understand. On some level, he's a Preston Sturges character—or Preston Tucker, the way a film-maker with less reverence than Francis Coppola might have presented him; on another, he's a Jewish gangland czar with a permanent erection. There's never been a character quite like him at the center of a gangster movie before—or a gangster movie quite like *Bugsy*. Toback and Levinson evoke American gangster pictures of earlier eras, especially the pioneering trio from the early-talkie period, *Little Caesar* and *Public Enemy* and *Scarface*. Like them, *Bugsy* is a brash, bold-faced entertainment, and the wisecracking repartee between Beatty and Bening suggests what Cagney and Harlow might have been like together if he'd caught her just a moment later in her career, when she'd dropped the awkward debutante pose and become the sashaying sex-doll comedienne of *Bombshell* and *Dinner at Eight*. But *Bugsy* keeps you conscious that the film-makers are quoting: partly because it's set much later than the Prohibition of those movies—in the mid-40s, when the gangster genre had become wan and repetitive (just before film noir resuscitated it)—and partly because the sparseness and quickness of Toback's dialogue, with its line-drawing finesse, have a postmodern ring.

All this layering of allusions is quite deliberate. The real subject of *Bugsy* is Hollywood—a point Levinson makes repeatedly: in the gleeming-seedy backlot look of Beatty and Bening's first scene (where he approaches her between takes on a movie set and she deflects his pass with the level cool of a sexually confident gold digger); when he silhouettes their first kiss; and when he ends Siegel's life in a flashy, self-reflexive sequence in Ben's Hollywood mansion, where the bullets interrupt him while he's watching the screen test he wangled through his pal George Raft (Joe Mantegna). (Ben's death scene is meant to echo the flamboyant finales of earlier movie gangsters' careers—especially Edward G. Robinson's in *Little Caesar*—but it's also meant, I think, to match them.) Ben Siegel, with his one-third of an illicit empire—Meyer Lansky (Ben Kingsley) and Charlie "Lucky" Luciano (the late Bill Graham) rule the other two-thirds—and his schoolboy crush on the movies and his cascading, out-of-control dream of a casino in Las Vegas, is the gangster as Hollywood mogul and Hollywood director rolled into one. And Ben's Jewishness links him to most of the studio heads of the 30s and 40s. As most of them did, he has his nice, family-man side—his Long Island wife, Esta (Wendy Phillips, of the TV series "Homefront"), and his daughters—and his tootsie on the side.

Warren Beatty's unique farceur's gift for mixing erotic panache and country-bumpkin foolishness is the trump card the film-makers need to make their image of Ben Siegel both touching and hilarious. No other actor could carry off, with anything like Beatty's cockeyed-clown deftness, a triple-tiered scene where Ben, in an apron and a chef's hat, is visited at home by Lansky and his men while he's decorating a cake for his daughter's birthday. Here Ben tries (frenetically and unsuccessfully) to balance his domestic obligations with reassurances to Meyer that he's not taking his partner over the top in his Flamingo Hotel deal, and at the same time confides in Meyer his newest cuckoo plan—to assassinate Mussolini. Beatty gives his best performance in years, even if you miss the poetic quality he brought to his Clyde Barrow and his John McCabe, and the depth he showed in *Shampoo* and the best parts of *Reds*. It's a fine-tuned, shallow piece of acting, sustained as high-voltage showmanship by the number of balls Beatty keeps in the air at one time: Ben the Don Juan and Ben the lovelorn sap, Ben the powerful hood with a pathologically violent streak and Ben the dreamer, Ben the confident gambler and Ben the doomed romantic.

There are a couple of scenes where Beatty—

and the movie—dive under the varied, entertaining pop surface. When Esta backs Ben into a corner, slapping his face to force him to ask her for a divorce, we suddenly understand that he's the kind of man who, though he's capable of terrorizing an associate (Richard Sarafian) he thinks he has cheated on him, or pummeling one of Virginia's old boyfriends, can't stand playing the bad guy with his wife and kids. (He wants *Esta* to call the marriage off; then he won't feel guilty.) And when his old pal Harry Greenberg (Elliott Gould), a compulsive stoolie and screwup, shows up on his doorstep after the evidence he leaked gets Luciano deported, Beatty gives Ben's conflicting loyalties an almost tragic color. In the terrific little (three-scene) role of Harry, Gould has a hefty Sad Sack look, but his eyes are alert and his downcast readings have a soft comic spring to them that surprises you on every line.

Levinson's movies were out of sync for a long time before *Bugsy*, but he can be marvelous with actors; there wasn't a bum performance in his last, *Avalon*, though the ponderous, sentimental approach he took to the immigrant-family-breakup story ended up suffocating his talented cast anyway. The acting in *Bugsy* is flawless, and some of the character work—Gould's, Kingsley's as an amused, avuncular Lansky, Harvey Keitel's as Siegel's brusque right-hand man, Mickey Cohen—ranks with the best these actors have done. Auburn-haired Annette Bening, smashingly costumed by Albert Wolsky (in one scene, she wears a white fur, spiralled around one arm and dripping off the other), makes you think of Barbara Stanwyck and Gloria Grahame and the Bette Davis of *Marked Woman* when you're not thinking of Harlow, but Bening's low-down, purring wit is her own. Bening is a movie star who's also a smart, inventive actress—qualities that distinguished her in *The Grifters* but didn't come through in her wifey roles in *Guilty by Suspicion* and *Regarding Henry*. She says she took the role of Virginia Hill because of Toback's wonderful lines, and she rings unexpected changes on every one. (The trailer for *Bugsy* includes the silhouetted kiss scene, but evidently an earlier take; it's fun to compare the baby-doll curlicue at the end of her line, "Do you always talk this much before you do it?," in the trailer with the crisper, tougher, more blatantly insinuating pounce of her reading in the actual film.) She has great moves, too, like the way she wriggles into the doorway behind Beatty while he's eating dinner. Every joint in her body seems to operate at once, yet her movements are purely liquid—she dances on the air like an electric current.

Levinson deserves a lot of credit for *Bugsy*, which looks and sounds superb: Allen Daviau's photography has a pearly glimmer, and Ennio Morricone's unusually textured score is sneakily affecting. But the movie's problems mostly lie in Levinson's domain. The pacing sometimes feels off, and there's a peculiar disjunction in tone between the script and the direction. Toback has written a funny, jazzy, pert screenplay, but Levinson gets hung up on the melancholy currents running through it. The crowd scenes are oddly underpopulated—deliberately, I assume, to foreshadow the failure of Ben Siegel's big Hollywood gesture (the opening of the Flamingo Hotel) and his early demise. And, though this may be as much Toback's fault as Levinson's, the final scenes, except for his shooting, are foggy and unshaped: it's hard to tell how we're meant to take the last couple of episodes in the Ben-Virginia relationship, or exactly what Virginia's motivation is for the way she seems to first betray, then attempt to rescue him. At the end, hearing of his death, she stands, silent and incredulous, for a long time, then walks outside the Flamingo Hotel to hail a cab; the camera then drifts away from her, across the desert, and a title informs us that she committed suicide in Austria shortly afterwards. The floating sadness of this ending is awfully close in tone to the end of *Avalon*, where the protagonist, now grown, takes his own son to see his grandfather in an old age home and Levinson underscores the way the family has become disparate and isolated. The two pieces of material are so different that you wish Levinson hadn't brought them together at the end, but instead had found a way to sign off *Bugsy* that paid tribute to the film's distinctive temperament.

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The Annual *FQ* Film Book Roundup

Bigger! Better!! More Than Ever!!!

Books! Books!! BOOKS!!!

This year the annual summer book roundup has more reviews than ever before. This is in many ways a good thing, but it does reveal how hard it is to keep pace with what seems to be an ever-increasing number of publications. We hope that those reviewers whose work has waited long for publication and those authors whose books have not yet been mentioned in *FQ* will rejoice that their time has now come—and will forgive the delay. Some entries do go back a long way, and for this we apologize.

In order to ensure that most of the reviews that have been languishing on our list would appear in print, some drastic trimming and pruning and even cutting has taken place. We are grateful to reviewers who generously allowed us to sacrifice the individual for the sake of the whole. As usual, we'll continue the book roundup in the Fall issue. And something new: books are now listed alphabetically by title, and there are no category groupings. We welcome your comments on this change.

In this note, "we" refers to me and to Book Review Editor David Desser, without whose help . . . He has truly performed miracles with his impeccable knowledge, dedication, and efficiency. Thank you, David. And many congratulations on your new position as Editor of *Cinema Journal*. Our loss is certainly their gain, and I shall miss you. A.M.

Alfred Hitchcock's High Vernacular
Theory and Practice

By Stefan Sharff. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. $32.50.

Comprised of shot-by-shot, second-by-second descriptions of *Notorious, Family Plot,* and *Frenzy*, Stefan Sharff's *Alfred Hitchcock's High Vernacular: Theory and Practice* must have been in its unavoidable tediousness a difficult book to write. That Sharff persisted is testimony to his high regard for Hitchcock's accomplishments.

Among the last decade's outpouring of Hitchcock books one stands out as Sharff's model—William Rothman's *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze* (1982). Both books pay homage to the intelligence of Hitchcock's authorship by means of the shot-by-shot analyses of cinematic forms in a limited set of Hitchcock movies (Rothman's includes *The Lodger, Murder!, The 39 Steps, Shadow of a Doubt,* and *Psycho*); each starts (more or less) from critical scratch, with few if any overt engagements with the larger "Hitchcock" discourse. Indeed, the only explanation I can offer for Sharff's decision to focus on *Notorious, Family Plot,* and *Frenzy*, and in *that* order—in the absence of any real explanation from Sharff himself—is that he wanted to avoid direct comparison with Rothman by picking an entirely different corpus for analysis while still concluding on a quintessentially "Hitchcockian" note.

And it's a good thing he did, because the first paragraph of Rothman's 1975 *Georgia Review* analysis of *Notorious* clearly anticipates not only Rothman's book but nearly everything Sharff wants to say about Hitchcock as well—roughly to the effect that Hitchcock "consistently employed and experimented with a series of distinctive cinematic techniques" (e.g., shot/reverse-shot sequences, point-of-view montages, etc.), each brought "to a new stage of development" within "strategies for synthesizing these different modes of presentation into a single coherent style" (Rothman, 884). Like Rothman, Sharff begins with a list of cinematic "structures" or "elements"—separation, parallel action, slow disclosure, familiar image, moving camera, multiangularity, master shot discipline, orchestration—the analysis of which, across the three chapters of his discussion, allows him to conclude "that Hitchcock has grasped the structures of the language of cinema and has practiced them with exquisite artistry" which "'throws light upon what amounts to base life and turns it into these exquisite masterpieces. By displaying the utmost linguistic variety he gives us proof of his genius, and lifts cinema language to the high vernacular in his eloquent and often flamboyant way" (244–45).

In this latter phrase we catch something of the unabashed structural-formalist enthusiasm which animates Sharff's study. Whether that methodology amounts to a genuine "theory" remains an open question. For instance, though Sharff repeatedly employs linguistic terminology, he makes a pretty complete hash of the matter. Two examples: 1) Sharff is eager to distinguish "movies" from "cinema," "pop" from "art," "passive" experience from "active" attentiveness (8), for which purpose he appeals to the notion of "film language." Yet in Sharff's *The Elements of Cinema: Toward a Theory of Cinesthetic Impact*, the avowed precursor of *Alfred Hitchcock's High Vernacular*, he defines all ordinary or "vernacular" instances of cinema—in which "information and meaning are synonymous"—as "nongrammatical" (32). From a linguistic standpoint, of course, ordinary usage more or less "defines" grammaticality; for Sharff, only that which *exceeds* the ordinary is truly "grammatical." Thus "grammatical" becomes an Eisensteinian imperative, involving an instance where a sequence of images effectively adds to or transforms the visual "reality" it depicts. 2) Moreover, what Sharff denotes by "grammatical" is almost entirely a matter of "cinematic phrases," by contrast with Sharff's notion of "syntax," which in his jargon equates with the overall "structure" of the film, its "orchestration" of "grammatical" sentences. Most linguists would reverse the order here, defining syntax as chiefly sentence-based, and "grammar" as the more inclusive semiotic category.

Happily, Sharff's paradigm of "elements" does *not* much depend upon linguistic analogies or concepts, so his linguistic confusion harms his often astute descriptive practice very little. Then again, his "practice" does nothing to confirm his "theory." Confirmed, rather, is Hitchcock's capacity to sustain analysis, even when analysis proceeds as much by teacherly exhortation as by theoretical precept. Sharff is deeply convinced that the elements he isolates *are* the basic building blocks of cinema, that films constructed with those elements in mind will be more cinematic; and Sharff obviously loves Hitchcock, as both his books attest. There is clearly more to Hitchcock's movies than is known in Sharff's resolutely literalist and avowedly antihermeneutic philosophy, but such devotion is almost always an important first step down the path toward a more thorough understanding. Sharff's *Alfred Hitchcock's High Vernacular* may well be the best place for some students to begin the journey.

LELAND POAGUE

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A Cinema Without Walls
Movies and Culture After Vietnam

By Timothy Corrigan. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991. $13.95.

While a number of books on communication studies have commented on the changes in the movie industry with the death of the studio system, the rise of the New Hollywood, and the burgeoning of the VCR and cable television industries, few have applied criticial theory to an appreciation of the impact of these changes on culture and individual films. Timothy Corrigan's *A Cinema Without Walls* is a good effort at filling that gap, conjoining cinema studies to speculations about the changing economy and technology of the movie industry in the last 25 years. This book's great ambition leaves it with some theoretical and logical pitfalls, but almost all of Corrigan's observations are so provocative and compelling it seems obvious that other scholars will eventually follow his lead and fill in the blanks.

Corrigan's argument is that the changes of New Hollywood run parallel to the changing political economy of the United States and the rest of the Western world. These changes coincide with a general social crisis after the Vietnam War, whose representation on television brought into question numerous moral, ethical, and ideological assumptions. In a thesis that

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becomes a rather familiar foundation for a concept of postmodernity, Corrigan argues that the takeover of the movie industry by multinational corporatism has increased the trivialization and spectacularization of the cinema, with movies becoming one commodity among many. The new industry tries continually to find a stable center in the atmosphere of the last 20 years, and offers a new type of blockbuster (*Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Batman* are two of many examples) that emphasizes action and special effects to reach the widest possible audience at a time when the concept of audience appears to be vanishing. In an increasingly diverse and disaffected society, the film industry seems disinclined or unable to produce films that address any social consensus beyond a general yearning for the good old days. The changes in technology tend to extend and support this condition, with the hegemony of the VCR and television causing people to "cocoon" and forsake the social experience of the theater for the privatized fantasy of the home entertainment system. For Corrigan, the VCR is as important as Vietnam (he juxtaposes them in a chapter title) in transforming the consciousness of the audience to the point of producing a new kind of spectator and a new subjectivity.

While the VCR has empowered people, giving them a sense of mastery over the image as films are frozen, moved forward and back, and combined with other programs, with the disappearence of film's mystique goes some of its power. In the age of video, the spectator consumes image fragments (an impulse to which MTV and most TV advertising caters with little concern for any stable point of reference, much less a coherent, carefully developed narrative line).

Most of Corrigan's chapters focus on films which in various ways respond to this new audience instability and rather schizoid subjectivity. These films, ranging from *Heaven's Gate* to *Platoon* to *Badlands* to *Blue Velvet*, share either a nostalgia for lost meaning or a sense of *jouissance* about the evacuation of narrative and stable truths. It is in the connection of these film analyses to his earlier theorizations that Corrigan's book falters.

Although the book's title privileges the Vietnam War, it is not clear how the war relates to Corrigan's assertions about the economy of New Hollywood and the rise of video beyond the media's spectacularization of Vietnam and the general legitimation crisis that the war produced. The relationship of Vietnam to postmodern subjectivity and the crisis in narrative is undertheorized, particularly given that Corrigan is finally dealing with the *international* cinema. Although he argues that corporate globalization has caused the subjectivity represented by postmodern cinema to penetrate all parts of the world, it remains unclear how the Vietnam War produced the same subjectivity and the same legitimation crisis in other nations, especially those that protested that adventure.

The short shrift given a topic in the book's subtitle is not so irksome when one gets into Corrigan's insightful film analyses. As the cinema struggles to find a stable audience to whom it can offer product, it continually offers self-parody and sites of hysteria. *Heaven's Gate*, in its hubris, excess, and blatant nostalgia, is almost a parody (were it not so deadly serious) of the older Hollywood "epic" that was able to turn American history into a coherent narrative. Films as disparate as *Badlands, Paris, Texas,* and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* turn on the notion that Hollywood's classic hero or hipster rebel has disappeared, replaced by an affectless, schizophrenic figure who wanders through a debris-filled wasteland unaware of any mission. Although the concept of the auteur is critically passé, Corrigan notes that the industry wants to foreground his adventures with a vengeance (the case of Coppola is representative), another symptom of a panicked recouping for an older, stable subjectivity.

For Corrigan, the Vietnam film itself is especially important for understanding the postmodern crisis in mainstream film narrative and the impossibility of representing history after media coverage of the war. The best of these films—*Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket* are dealt with in some detail —show how the war rendered impossible traditional notions of self and other, of boundaries, of the possibility of violence regenerating social meaning (as in historian Richard Slotkin's famous formulation). A difficulty here is that although Corrigan is aware he is dealing with the representation and narrativization of the war (by progressive filmmakers), he pays insufficient attention to the problems raised by an emphasis on the media and representation. He seems to assume that both Hollywood and the public were influenced uniformly and in the same way by the media coverage of Vietnam and the war's representation in cinema.

Corrigan is most interesting on "illegible" films (a concept that borrows from Robin Wood) like *Blue Velvet*, which signifies the instability of art, the industry, and its new market by being both a major New Hollywood success and a cult film, a film praised to the heavens by critics and reviled as moronic trash, all the while remaining largely unreadable (especially to its director) and embraced as representative of the postmodern condition.

Throughout this book Corrigan's observations about the place of cinema in postmodern culture feel cogent, and he has charted much of this territory superbly, even as his generalizations about how audiences now see film and experience media technology are bur-

dened by obvious fallacies. Most bothersome is his inattention to the historical specificity of Vietnam as a war rather than a media phenomenon; the book could stand more emphasis on the real, less on the hyperreal.

CHRISTOPHER SHARRETT

▪ Christopher Sharrett teaches at Seton Hall University.

Close Encounters

Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction

Edited by Constance Penley, Elisabeth Lyon, Lynn Spigel, and Janet Bergstrom. A *Camera Obscura* book. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1991. $39.95 cloth; $13.95 paper.

Close Encounters is mostly a reprinting of articles about science fiction that appeared in a 1986 issue of *Camera Obscura*. Not all the articles are about film (two are about serialized television programs, and one about Villiers de l'Isle-Adams's science-fiction novel, *The Future Eve*). All, however, make the assumption that fantasies in science fiction correspond to social reality in one way or another—whether by arguing that "The Jetsons" TV cartoon is a symptom of the "troubled" merger in 1960s America between "1950s domesticity" and the Space Age (Lynn Spigel, 205), or by telling how a scene suggesting incestuous relations between characters was cut from *Metropolis* because it was socially unacceptable (Enno Parals, 167).

Though familiarity is not necessarily a bad thing, it *is* striking just how familiar most of the arguments and examples in this collection of essays are—from Vivian Sobchack's vision of how the birth of monster children in movies such as *Rosemary's Baby* shows that "American bourgeois patriarchy [is] in crisis" (3) to Lynn Spigel's claim that sitcoms make us "question the 'naturalness' of middle-class existence" (219), and from Janet Bergstrom's belief that the presence of androgyny in science-fiction movies like *Liquid Sky* and in Calvin Klein underwear ads represents a crisis in the representation of gender difference to Harvey Greenberg's analysis of the alien in *Alien* as paradoxically threatening and appealing. Raymond Bellour's idea that men need to represent technology in feminine forms is now well established, as is Constance Penley's linkage of the primal scene fantasy to narrative problems in "technological modernity." We have also come to be familiar with proto-fascist elements in *Metropolis* (Roger Dadoun). The examples of science fiction, too, are the usual ones: *Metropolis, Star Trek, The Terminator, Blade Runner,* and *Alien,* among others. In all fairness, however, it is precisely *because of* these articles and others like them that now such arguments and such examples can seem commonplace.

Perhaps the time has come to admit that these kinds of essays are actually an entrenched part of academic criticism, and that it now seems a bit old-fashioned when some of the writers of the articles in *Close Encounters*—all university professors but one—claim that their work touches upon issues that are "scandalous" and dangerous to "traditional academic criticism" (Henry Jenkins III, 172). At least in the five years since these essays were first published, it is not at all clear that they have been truly subversive to the academy, though they surely have contributed to current debates about the place of popular culture in the university curriculum.

Close Encounters may be slightly subversive to the conventions of the publishing industry. The nicely surprising inclusion of a film script, *Friendship's Death,* by Peter Wollen in this collection of essays is ultimately what saves *Close Encounters*, what makes the rereading of the *Camera Obscura* articles worthwhile, since the articles and the film script recontextualize each other in curious ways. Indeed, this relationship between the two is the most compelling "close encounter" in *Close Encounters*. After we read Wollen's film script, for example, the articles take on narrative, dramatic qualities that we may not have noticed before; each article seems a bit like a character's lines in a big script, and, as such, seems more vulnerable and eccentric than it might originally have appeared. Similarly, Wollen's film script takes on aspects of the journal article. The dialogues between the two main characters—a male reporter and a female extraterrestrial—seem to be a way to make film theory personable, funny, and, in a way, itself uncanny. Text and criticism are thus given a chance by the editors of *Close Encounters* (Penley, Lyon, Spigel, Bergstrom) to demonstrate their powers to transform each other.

I hope the book's pairing of "text" and "criticism" sets a precedent for those who are in the business of making collections out of previously published articles. Since it is now normal to conclude that the distinction between "text" and "criticism"—like that between social realities and science-fiction fantasies—is often merely a conventional one, it would be strange for us to continue publishing them as if they were two different creatures.

SARAH MARKGRAF

▪ Sarah Markgraf teaches at Columbia University.

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SARAH MARKGRAF

▪ Sarah Markgraf teaches at Columbia University.

Comedy

The Theory of Comedy in Literature, Drama, and the Cinema

By T. G. A. Nelson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. $11.95.

Popular Film and Television Comedy

By Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1990. $15.95.

To Wit

Skin and Bones of Comedy

By Penelope Gilliatt. New York: Charles Scribner's, 1990. $24.95.

Hollywood comedy—romantic or otherwise—tops the cinematic charts each year. But challenging critical attention has been slow to appear beyond the level of individual reviews and coffee-table tributes to specific comic talents.

No longer. After years of critical neglect, the muse of screen comedy has begun to receive a carnival of worthy analytical and appreciative attention. And what characterizes the best of these studies is a desire to go beyond the boundaries of any one medium to include both film and television and, in many cases, literary, dramatic, and nondramatic (stand-up comedy, for example) forms of comedy and laughter. Furthermore, the best of this new breed of scholar-critics make use of literary and cinema theory to bring forth new insight on both laughter and comedy. "No single theory can explain all laughter or all comedy" (1), comments T. G. A. Nelson in his concise and cogent study. But multitheoretical task forces are having pleasing results. Samples include Jerry Palmer's *The Logic of the Absurd: On Film and Television Comedy* (London: British Film Institute, 1987) in film studies; David Marc's *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture* (Boston: Hyman, 1989) in television studies; and Harry Levin's *Playboys & Killjoys: An Essay on the Theory & Practice of Comedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

The weakest of the current crop is Penelope Gilliatt's odd collection of reviews, interviews, and offhanded ramblings disguised as a book, *To Wit: Skin and Bones of Comedy*. Gilliatt's overall failure is a total lack of an articulated perspective from which to view wit and comedy (no real designation of the meaning of either term is ever offered). Thus we are left to plow through fleeting vague observations often laced with errors (she calls Lotte Eisner "Lotte Weisner," for instance, 34) and even at times confused as to both grammar and style: what is one to make of, for example, "Great spokesmen on the wander that we call comic, for lack of other adjective sufficient . . ." (21)?

Individual lines, phrases, moments, however, find their mark. She is perceptive on John Cleese and crew and British humor in general: "The butts of English jokes are male and historic" (112), and her brief discussion of Czech film-makers is useful—"The Czech's ability not to diminish strangeness into quaintness is part of their natural engagement" (167). Best of all, she includes her long piece on her visit to the late Jacques Tati. "Tati sees and hears phenomenally," she notes, "because he lacks self-absorption" (195).

Popular Film and Television Comedy, in pleasing contrast, offers much. Though Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik's work often suffers from a case of academic prose and too long-winded a quoting and paraphrasing of various theories, their approach is broad based and pleasingly thorough. Dividing the territory into two major characteristics—the necessity of a happy ending and laughter itself—they launch a multifaceted front that incorporates much of contemporary theoretical thinking well applied. Early on, for instance, they note that "A happy ending implies a narrative context, the generation of laughter does not" (17).

Neale and Krutnik have read their Bordwell on classical cinema, Cavell on the Hollywood comedies of remarriage, McCaffrey on slapstick and narrative, Henderson on romantic comedy, Raymond Williams and John Ellis on television, and Ted Sennett on anarchic love and cinema comedy. The result, despite the surprising lack of a bibliography in this study, is that they provide the expert and the student of comedy alike a lucid take on the whole field of the theory of media comedy and an often provocative look at specific topics. They identify comedy in general, for instance, as ". . . precisely a game played with trangression and familiarity; it sets up deviations from 'rules' and 'norms' in order to replace them" (149). Much good discussion follows on the psychoanalytic take on comedy, riffing off of Freud and going beyond.

Two quibbles, however. First, the book reads as if the manuscript had been prepared a handful of years ago and not updated. Thus the disappointingly brief mention of "Cheers," for instance, speaks of Sam and Diane instead of Sam and Rebecca, and the only lengthy discussion of a single show is reserved, all 15 pages of it, for "Steptoe and Son" instead of a show such as "Roseanne" or "Cheers" that has had a more lasting impact on audiences everywhere. Secondly, sec-

tion three, which covers television and broadcast comedy, is too heavily weighted toward British comedy, given the title of the book. Either a separate book is needed or one that strives to do more justice to the variety of American television comedy, taking into account —as this book does not—David Marc's theoretical work.

Brightest of the lot is T. G. A. Nelson's handy paperback, *Comedy: The Theory of Comedy in Literature, Drama, and the Cinema*. Beginning with a reference to Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and its focus on "the case for and against comedy and laughter," Nelson, like Neale and Krutnik, carves up the subject into manageable segments based on this twin division.

What Nelson manages well is an easily consumed prose style that is itself reflective of wit and quickness of mind and is intellectually sound without being ponderous or plodding. A lecturer in English at the University of New England, New South Wales, Nelson has the broadest and most up-to-date canvas of all. The chapter divisions suggest his scope: these include, in part, Laughter; Comedy and Related Forms; Marriage; Procreation (discussing the "nausea of parenthood" vs. the "needed disorder" of children, he sheds light on everyone from Hogarth to Dickens and his contradictory ideas on children); Death; Rogue and Trickster; and Laughter or Harmony? On the theoretical front, Nelson picks up a number of useful voices that Neale and Krutnik miss or gloss over too swiftly, including Harvey Cox, F. M. Cornford, C. L. Barber, Peter Burke, Mircea Eliade, and Wittgenstein, and presents a balanced view of festivity/carnival/the grotesque as put forth by Mikhail Bakhtin. A very solid bibliography for further reading is also to be appreciated in this work that does more in its 200 pages than Neale and Krutnik manage in 300.

Nelson's final virtue is his awareness that beyond a case for the study of comedy and laughter there is also the case against the close scrutiny of the subject. "There are few jokes," he remarks, "whose appeal can be confidently explained in terms of a single factor. . . ." (9). His subsequent discussion of this point takes him from *Lysistrata* to *Crimes of the Heart* and on to *Outrageous Fortune*. No film is discussed in detail, but the wealth of perspectives offered will serve future studies of film and television comedy (and laughter) well.

ANDREW HORTON

▪ Andrew Horton teaches at Loyola University in New Orleans.

The Cult Film Experience
Beyond All Reason

Edited by J. P. Telotte. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991. $36.00 cloth; $15.95 paper.

By virtue of the narrow, discrete viewing community to which they appeal, the intensity of their following, and their frequent flaunting of outré characters and forms of behavior, cult films would seem to be a clearly distinct phenomenon compared with the resolutely mainstream appeals and blandly inoffensive content of many Hollywood studio productions. But despite its deceptively familiar nature, the cult film phenomenon incorporates a remarkably diverse range of film types and consequent appeals to viewers: *Casablanca, The Wizard of Oz, Rebel Without a Cause, Pink Flamingos, The Rocky Horror Picture Show, An American Werewolf in London, Monty Python and the Holy Grail, The Harder They Come*. As J. P. Telotte points out in a new anthology of essays he has assembled on the cult film, these works, by virtue of their diversity, challenge the critic "to find a clear 'supertext' or storehouse for the form's varied stylistic and thematic elements" (6).

At a very general level, however, some clear, quasi-generic distinctions are apparent among films that have attracted passionate cult followings. Accordingly, the essays in *The Cult Film Experience* examine films that are grouped in two categories: the classical cult film (i.e., Hollywood studio productions from earlier decades, such as *Casablanca* and *Beat the Devil*) and midnight movies (i.e., films of more recent vintage with a decidedly outlaw appeal, such as *Liquid Sky* or *Pink Flamingos*).

Telotte, Bruce Kawin, Timonthy Corrigan, Barry K. Grant, and other contributors emphasize the transgressive nature of cult films—their delight in flaunting social conventions or the canons of appropriate behavior and taste—and the way their relationship with the audience is structured in a far more active way than is normally the case (e.g., viewers adopt cult films, recite cherished dialogue during the film, or, in the celebrated case of *Rocky Horror*, engage in more elaborate imitative rituals).

In other respects, however, as Telotte notes in his introduction, many of the contributors freely disagree about the nature of the cult phenomenon and its boundaries. One of the interesting tensions among the essays, for example, is between those which offer traditional textual exegesis, typically in a detached, analytical tone, and those which seek, following the book's title, to

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explain or describe in more immediate, affective terms the cult film *experience*, the emotional encounter of viewers with these films.

Textual interpretation is represented by, among others, Barry K. Grant's ideological readings of cult films, in which he stresses the important distinction between textual interpretation and viewer reception. Noting the impatience of a Toronto Film Festival audience at a screening of *Night of the Living Dead*, where George Romero was asked about the ideological implications of his work, Grant points out that the viewers were eager instead to see the film and get to the good (i.e., bloody) parts. By contrast, the encounter of cult fulms and their audiences is explored by, among others, Wade Jennings in his fine description of the Judy Garland cult and the complex emotional transactions between the performer and her following. Jennings offers some especially insightful analyses of the role played by technology in shaping celebrity cult stardom.

Gregory A. Waller's market study of midnight movie screenings in Lexington, Kentucky, from 1980–1985 is a valuable summary essay that clearly demonstrates the size and diversity of the midnight movie phenomenon. Waller also compares his Kentucky data with midnight-movie booking patterns in New York City, demonstrating important geographic and sociological variations in cult film accessibility and acceptability in divergent communities. One of the important lessons to be gleaned from Waller's data is that the notion of transgressive pleasures cannot be formulated as solely textual features but are constructed in relation to geographically and socially varying community norms.

Grasping the complexity of the emotional appeal of the movies is one of the most difficult and challenging tasks that film theory has yet to confront (in ways that extend or offer alternatives to psychoanalytic accounts). This challenge is especially acute with cult films, whose fans so passionately adopt and embrace them. *The Cult Film Experience* initiates a sustained scholarly discussion and debate which, one hopes, will, in turn, stimulate additional research and reflection on the ways movies make meaning and pleasure.

STEPHEN PRINCE

▪ Stephen Prince teaches at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film
The Early Years at Biograph

By Tom Gunning. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991. $39.95.

In *A Million and One Nights* (1926), Terry Ramsaye wrote, "Of the many who went . . . to find a place in the new art of the pictures, few names remain, but there is one outstanding survival of those beginnings": D. W. Griffith. Thirteen years later, in *The Rise of the American Film*, Lewis Jacobs observed of Griffith that "in the entire history of the American screen, no other director achieved greater success, none won more esteem."

These judgments from two of the most important early historians of American movies indicate the honored, even legendary, status D. W. Griffith early assumed in the history of American movies. Yet before 1970, much of the writing on Griffith focused almost entirely on the feature films and only a few of the nearly 500 one- and two-reel films he directed for Biograph between 1908 and 1913 as he began his directing career. In the past two decades, however, film scholars like Russell Merritt, Kemp Niver, Roberta Pearson, and Joyce Jesionowski have looked more closely at these Biograph films. Recently an important study of Griffith's early career at Biograph has appeared, Tom Gunning's *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film*.

The subtitle of his book, *The Early Years at Biograph*, suggests its focus. Concentrating on Griffith's films of 1908 and 1909, the book aims, in Gunning's words, "to analyze the narrative structure of these films closely and to place them in a historical context." That context includes both the history of narrative form in movies before Griffith and the history of the transformations in the film industry while he was making the films. Gunning emphasizes these two years because, in his words, they "witnessed the greatest transformation in Griffith's narrative form, as well as an important upheaval in the American film industry—the creation of the Motion Picture Patents Company" (3). Gunning's central theme is that during these years film was shifting from "a 'cinema of attractions,' which was more interested in the display of curiosities, to a cinema of narrative integration which subordinates film form to the development of stories and characters" (6). In short, the movies were moving toward the conventions of classical Hollywood cinema, and Griffith was a key figure in helping realize the aesthetic possibilities of narrative form in cinema during those crucial years.

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The book contains nine chapters and an epilogue. The first chapter draws on and adapts to the medium of film a number of concepts from Gerard Genette's *Narrative Discourse* in establishing a precise way to discuss film narrative. The second chapter revises the traditional view that Griffith's achievement was to move film away from its theatrical roots toward an essentially cinematic language. Gunning modifies that received view by defining the shift as a drive from the cinema of attractions toward the cinema of narrative integration. Chapters 3 through 8 then chronologically explore Griffith, his films, and the film industry in 1908 and 1909, alternating between close readings of individual films and discussions of the transformations in film production, distribution, and exhibition practices in those two turbulent years. Chapter 9 looks more generally at how Griffith extended and refined developments of "the narrator system" in subsequent years at Biograph.

The book convincingly outlines how Griffith, appearing on the scene after the nickelodeon boom had created an enormous demand for movies, gradually developed a capacity to tell self-contained and absorbing narratives in his one- and two-reel films. Against a background that includes the formation of the Motion Picture Patents Company, the *film d'art* movement, shifts in movie distribution, censorship activities, and attempts to attract a broader audience by "uplifting" the movies, Gunning carefully and accurately shows how Griffith's short films during these two years began to realize the possibilities of narrative cinema.

When Griffith began directing, narratives had become a common film type, but film-makers were having such difficulty making their stories clear to audiences that some theaters were even hiring lecturers to explain the events transpiring on the screen. One of Griffith's key achievements, Gunning tells us, was to develop the narrator system, "the series of filmic devices through which Griffith centers on the task of narration." He did so by attending to all three categories of what Gunning terms "filmic discourse": profilmic elements (those elements placed before the camera—actors, lighting, set design, and so in); the enframed image (the way the camera presents the image); and editing.

Gunning details how Griffith, in his 1909 Biograph films, extended the possibilities of film style in all three areas. Among the key profilmic elements Griffith drew on were the use of expressive lighting in key shots, the naturalistic use of outdoor locations, and the shift of acting from an exaggerated, histrionic style to a more subtle restrained style that Gunning, drawing on Roberta Pearson's work, calls "verisimilar." Handling of the enframed image also shifted. Griffith's camera distance became tighter, he began to use the depth of the frame more effectively, and camera movement became more common and served an increasing variety of narrative functions. In editing, Griffith began to cut more frequently in 1909; an interesting chart shows that the average number of shots per 1,000 feet of film jumped from 16.6 in 1908 to 24.8 in 1909 (and eventually to 87.8 in 1913). Griffith also continued to refine the possibilities of parallel editing in 1909. This latter device, he gradually realized, could dramatically shape the relations of time and space and contribute to the creation of a variety of effects, particularly suspense and irony. Drawing on these developments, Griffith was able to evoke powerful emotions through the presentation of imagery in 1909 films like *The Open Gate* or to illuminate social and economic relations through parallel editing in *A Corner in Wheat*. Though Griffith would extend and develop his film style further in later Biograph films through such devices as the close-up and analytical editing within scenes, Gunning argues that by the end of 1909 the fundamental features of the "narrator system" were established.

The book contains a number of strengths; let me highlight two. The first is its general approach to film history, which proceeds on the assumption that "history and theory must proceed in tandem in film study with the methods of one supplementing the undertakings of the other" (4). Allied to that assumption is Gunning's conviction that "although the methods of industrial history and textual analysis diverge, a true historical analysis demands their interrelation" (289). This commitment to study the relationship between text and industrial context, grounded in a theoretically aware film history, makes the book a model of the new film history.

A second strength is Gunning's impressively thorough familiarity with the films and the industrial context. A number of extended subtle readings of individual films blend close textual analysis with attention to relevant context. For example, the discussion of *A Drunkard's Reformation* convincingly shows through shot-by-shot analysis how Griffith uses editing to convey the psychological development of the main character and, in the final shot, directional lighting to intensify the effect of the family reconciliation following the drunkard's epiphany. The reading also effectively brings in significant contextual material, such as the background of other popular temperance works and the desires of many in the M.P.C.C. to move from "obscene films" to "high-class drama" following the censorship crackdown on New York City movie theaters on Christmas Eve of 1908. Gunning shows how "high-class dramas" like *A Drunkard's Reformation* can be considered the industry's response to the fears of censorship and a manifestation of its desire to

expand the moviegoing audience. Readings of other films—both more familiar Griffith films like *The Lonely Villa* and *A Corner in Wheat* and less familiar ones like *The Drive for Life* and *A Country Doctor*—demonstrate Gunning's intimate familiarity with Griffith's films and his sensitivity as a critic/historian of text and context.

One might define a good book as one which makes the reader want more. I felt that way in reading *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of Narrative Cinema*, and if the book were longer, I would have looked for clarification or elaboration on two fronts. First, the relationship between the "narrator system" and what has come to be called the classical Hollywood system is a bit sketchy in the book. It seems to me that the narrator system, as Gunning defines it, is central to what has been called classical Hollywood cinema. However, Gunning says it is both a "founding moment" in the classical system yet also "at odds" with it (295), an observation that warrants further discussion. Second, Gunning's conception of film history as an examination of individual films, the film industry, and "the larger forces of social history" focuses more on the first two than on social history. A longer book could have defined the conception of "social history" more fully, clarified the way(s) social history links to films and the film industry, and integrated more social history into the discussion. I found the book especially interesting when, as in the discussion of *A Corner in Wheat*, social history was central to the discussion. More such analysis would have been welcome.

But considering the thoughtfulness, the wealth of detail, and the thoroughness of research that characterize this book, one suspects that the author has much more to say about these and other subjects. *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of Narrative Cinema* establishes Tom Gunning as an authoritative historian not only of Griffith's Biograph films but also of that crucial period when American movies were learning to tell stories as they had never been told before. CHARLES MALAND

▪ Charles Maland teaches at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Early Cinema
Space, Frame, Narrative

Edited by Thomas Elsaesser, with Adam Barker. London: BFI Publishing, 1990. N.p.

This new reader is an essential, if intermittently irritating, book for anyone concerned with contemporary modes of reading and writing film history. It anthologizes 28 essays by 20 scholars originally published between 1978 and 1988 in such venues as *Cinema Journal, Cinetracts, Framework, Iris, QRFS, Screen, Sight & Sound,* and *Wide Angle,* some of which have been revised and some not. For Thomas Elsaesser, however, all are informed by the "new historicism" that emerged from the 1978 FIAF conference in Brighton, especially Noël Burch's conceptualization (in "Porter, or Ambivalence") of the "primitive cinema" as a distinct "mode of representation" (the PMR) when compared to the "institutional mode" (the IMR). According to Elsaesser, the spirit of that conference has led a new generation of film scholars to reformulate the history of early cinema, demoting intrinsic filmic evidence in favor of verifiable data about the industrialization of entertainment and leisure, with the ultimate goal of integrating all of film history into the wider cultural and economic context of the entertainment and consciousness industries.

In the current volume, Elsaesser brings together some of the most important contributions made since Brighton and, through introductions comprising fully 20 percent of its text (84 of 413 pages), casts them into "a kind of story" with two major themes: the cinema's turn toward narrative as its mainstream form, and the industrialization/commodification of the feature as its standard product. The book is organized into three parts—"Early Film Form: Articulations of Space and Time," which asks, *pace* Burch, whether early cinema should be viewed as an autonomous system of representation, or as part of something larger; "The Institution Cinema: Industry, Commodity, Audiences," which addresses questions of historical specificity in the economic and technological spheres; and "The Continuity System: Griffith and Beyond," where the emergence of (near) classical narrative logic gives rise to cinematic subjectivity and "the isolation of the spectator." Each section is further subdivided into an editor's introduction and a series of topics, more or less chronologically arranged (e.g., part I proceeds from the subheading "Shot Relations, Narration: Articulating Space and Time" through "Lumière: Actualities, Fiction, Narrative" and "Méliès: Continuity, Non-Continuity" to "Porter: Adapting, Presenting, Narrating"). The vol-

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ume concludes with the editor's afterword and a select bibliography (which unaccountably omits Joyce Jesionowski's *Thinking in Pictures: Dramatic Structure in D. W. Griffith's Biograph Films* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988] from all of its categories), but it contains no index—a real disadvantage for a book of this complexity, variety, and length.

In his general introduction, "Early Cinema: From Linear History to Mass Media Archaeology," Elsaesser explains that a quarter of the material selected for inclusion had to be cut for reasons of space, while other important essays were unavailable for republication. These circumstances have led him to summarize and then contextualize the missing pieces in his introductions—a practice alternately illuminating and confusing, since in telling his "story" (the recasting of traditional film history from debates centered on early cinema), he makes no distinction between what is present and absent in the text that follows. Thus, in the 20-page introduction to part I, Elsaesser spends several pages discussing the work of scholars who do not appear in the volume at all (e.g., Marshall Deutelbaum and David Levy) and several more discussing essays by Noël Burch ("Porter or Ambivalence," "Passion, Pursuit"), although Burch's single contribution to *Early Cinema* appears not in part I but part II. There are implicit reasons for this disproportion, of course, but it will prove confusing to those not intimately familiar with the historiography of the period. A further problem with the introductions has to do with Elsaesser's occasional descent to the nadir of poststructuralist jargon.

There are also logical contradictions: in the introduction to part III we are given a specific list of Griffith's practices that led to the development of narrative features—"*his* ability to subdivide plot-lines," "*Griffith's* involvement in the contemporary theatre," "*Griffith's* own 'Victorianism,'" and "*his* ability to use parallel editing" (my italics)—and then told flatly on the same page that "Griffith's stylistic developments are determined not by individual genius but by the pressures on the emergent cinematic institution." Such lapses are infrequent, however, and on the whole the introductory essays are inscribed with subtlety of thought and keen intelligence. And they do, finally, achieve Elsaesser's goal of reconstructing the trajectory of work in early cinema since Brighton "in intelligible form" and making its contours clear.

The essays chosen for the reader are of the highest quality, most having broken new ground and/or contributed to an ongoing debate ("monstration" [showing] v. narration [telling] in the PMR; "externality" v. "integration" [regarding parallel editing, crosscutting, and the insert] in the IMR, etc.) in a major way. But they offer few surprises, continuing in the post-Brighton tradition of Roger Holman's/André Gaudreault's *Cinema 1900–1906: An Analytical Study* (Brussels: FIAF, 1982) and John Fell's *Film Before Griffith* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), both of which Elsaesser acknowledges as predecessors. In the areas of early film form and mode of representation/presentation, there are four selections by Tom Gunning, four by André Gaudreault, two by Charles Musser, two by Ben Brewster, and one each by Barry Salt, Richard de Cordova, Noël Burch, Miriam Hansen, and Yuri Tsivian. Dai Vaughan, Stephen Bottemore, and Kevin Brownlow also appear for these categories in articles reprinted from *Sight & Sound*. Mode of production and the struggle for economic control are represented by Michael Chanan, Janet Staiger, and Patrick G. Loughney; and pieces by Anne Friedberg, Jacques Aumont, and Raymond Bellour are collected in the continuity system/Griffith section, as are new writings by John Fullerton and Leon Hunt on European versions of the classical paradigm. Where appropriate, selections are illustrated by handsomely reproduced frame enlargements which are especially valuable in the representation of deep space.

Nearly all of these essays, regardless of their specific subjects or points of view, are concerned in some way to comprehend that crucial process whereby an early cinema of noncontinuity (associated with spatial coherence and the PMR) became the classical cinema of coded narrative logic (linked to continuity editing and the IMR)—that historical movement, in other words, in which a unique kind of modern consciousness was born. It is a moment that commands our attention because the very discipline of Film Studies is grounded in it, but so too is much else, since, in Elsaesser's terms, narrative film became "the successful prototype of virtually all popular culture this century." Furthermore, it seems likely that in the next century the classical cinema will itself be understood less as a destination point than as a transitional phase in the movement toward some other system of audiovisual representation—one, perhaps, less narrative and less linear in its formal organization than we can yet imagine. In his Afterword, in fact, Elsaesser makes the initially astonishing suggestion that recasting traditional film theory might result in "nothing less than the reconstruction of the fabric of history itself." And, yet, why not? If, as he argues elsewhere in the volume, the cinema introduced a radically new, universally comprehensible logic of the visible, transforming the ways in which knowledge is stored and disseminated, social experience is recorded, and subjectivity is constructed, has not that logic in our own time become the discourse of history itself? By proposing that a direct line can be drawn from Prometheus, Faust, and Dr. Frankenstein to

Thomas A. Edison, and, inversely, that contemporary televisual culture throws us back upon the early cinema's performative and (in Tom Gunning's sense) "attractive" modes, Elsaesser's volume invites us to speculate in this direction. And it fulfills rather admirably its ultimate promise—namely "to develop a framework which is capable of understanding the changes between early and classical cinema in a non-reductive and non-linear way." DAVID COOK

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Entertainment Industry Economics

A Guide for Financial Analysis

By Harold L. Vogel. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. $37.95.

It is now possible to understand the mechanics of film industry economics. Harold Vogel, an éminence grise of the movie biz, has updated his 1986 book because changes in the industry prompt a reevaluation of certain economic indicators. As a vice president and senior entertainment industry analyst for Merrill Lynch, Vogel looks only at the bottom line in macro-economic terms. In some sense, this text is directed primarily to industry specialists and/or investors looking for an economic overview of the American film industry. It's like reading *Variety* without the lingo. Its slightly less arcane language is that of accountants.

Vogel's book is divided into film, cable, TV, video, radio—and even explores the increasing economic power of gaming, sports, theme parks, and performing arts. Precisely because he does not confine his analysis to film, he puts into perspective the position of cinema in the larger picture of the "entertainment industry," reflecting why so many Hollywood corporations have diversified into other areas. This is a cold-blooded and often chilling account of how money is processed through the business of leisure, and should be required reading for anybody presuming to enter the film biz —including all those formerly socialist industries attempting an overnight conversion to capitalism. This book ignores the social good or cultural value of cinema and insists on treating it as a capitalist organ that can and does function with integrity.

This is not to say that Vogel ignores the possibilities of slick operations in such a capital-intensive business with a high risk. One of his more charming traits is the regularity with which he defends film executives as highly reputable, given the loopholes, temptations, and nature of accountability. He insists that in a business in which management slips back and forth from one side of the desk to another—i.e., studio executives become producers and vice versa—reputation can be more important than a fast buck. (Tell it to Begelman.) Vogel does show exactly *where* and *how* money is manipulated by those in control, and he applies phrases like "considerable discretionary variation" to dubious practices.

The text is studded with charts and graphs. We see the "contracyclical" nature of film, that is, its tendency either to make or lose money in an economy doing the opposite. Depression-resistant box office, however, has never been tested in an industry as diversified as this one, where video and cable can siphon off audiences disinclined to pay steep ticket prices. Vogel belongs to the camp that believes ancillary markets have failed to develop beyond the "enhancement of profits" stage. Still, his figures show that in 1980 theatrical sources accounted for half the revenues of a film, while ten years later they represent one quarter.

Vogel, of course, deals with data, and Hollywood studios provide the biggest chunk of such numbers. The accounting procedures of studios are more easily scrutinized and comprehended by someone with his corporate acumen than by, say, Art Buchwald. When Vogel concludes that the size of a film's budget has nothing to do with its earning power, he is technically correct, but he is not dealing with the odds. His conclusions should not legislate against the potential profitability of independent video companies or low-budget pictures to recoup in all media other than theatrical.

Vogel's primary subject is the method(s) of accounting that permit apparent contradictions of, for example, "income recognition," something "generally unrelated to cash collections," because, as he explains, "it is entirely possible to report earnings and be insolvent at the same time." The complex chain of transactions from the box office to the producer encourages the tendency to "ride the float," or hang on to money for one's own economic advantages. Years can pass without revenues unless a company has enough industry muscle to pry payments out of reluctant theater owners and distributors. *That* is business as usual.

Vogel's analysis of the 1976 tax code revisions is as thorough and useful as has ever been written. Because these revisions stipulated that the costs of producing a recording, film, or book are only deductible on a flow-of-income basis, prorated over the period during which the property *generates income*, U.S. artists were effectively discouraged from any creative activity that was not paid in advance, with a full set of projections of recoupment of cost. Only Vogel's refusal to editorial-

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ize on this industry report seems to keep him from calling for a radical change in the way the IRS assesses "research and development" (what else can one call it?) in arts and entertainment.

The book is invaluable in explaining problems of estimating grosses, the impact of technology, the danger of evaluating film libraries as assets, the emerging pay-per-view, rentals versus box office—all the things we tend to confuse and call shady. As cogent and credible as Vogel is, if he can do this for Hollywood, imagine what he could do for the Pentagon.

KAREN JAEHNE

▪ Karen Jaehne has just produced a low-budget feature, *Jack and His Friends.*

Femmes Fatales
Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis

By Mary Ann Doane. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991. $49.95 cloth; $15.95 paper.

A photograph of silent star Louise Brooks, seductive yet vulnerable in her famous helmet-shaped, bobbed haircut, graces the cover of Mary Ann Doane's *Femmes Fatales.* A collection of essays, some of them well known, that have appeared in diverse film publications during the past decade, this volume also includes three previously unpublished works that should interest feminist film critics. As Doane explains in an elegantly written introduction, her book is not really about the femme fatale, but focuses instead on that problematical female figure as emblematic of issues in discourses on knowledge, vision, and sexuality. Accordingly, only one of four sections is devoted to femmes fatales in *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946), *La Signora di tutti* (Max Ophuls, 1934), and *Pandora's Box* (G. W. Pabst, 1929). Additional sections address issues like the masquerade in feminist film theory and criticism, representations of the female body in avant-garde as opposed to classical cinema, and, most interestingly, further uses of the psychoanalytic model to study previously neglected but critical issues such as racial difference.

In tandem with Doane's frequently cited *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (1987), this collection of essays represents the trajectory of a theorist whose works are included in the canon of contemporary feminist film theory and criticism. As such, the essays invite a reconsideration of feminist theory based on poststructuralist and psychoanalytic constructs of the spectator as an effect of textual operations. Doane herself engages in such a reconsideration by including in her introduction a brief but useful account of debates as film studies evolved into an autonomous discipline, most notably the attempt to differentiate the study of film from that of literature; the resulting emphasis upon formal analyses that led to controversy about the significance of still shots as opposed to the phenomenological experience of film as movement; the dangers of feminist theory enshrined as orthodoxy addressed to "insiders" in academe; the fragmented nature of feminist writing which is hardly monolithic and has even voiced opposition to psychoanalysis; and, most important in my view, the confrontation of theory and history subsequent to the call to "historicize."

In "Remembering Women: Psychical and Historical Conclusions in Film Theory," the most problematical of the essays in the book, Doane rightly speculates about "the apparent exhaustion of psychoanalytic film theory" and the resulting "impasse" (80). Yet she cautions against any moves to dismantle or dethrone "theory" in favor of "history" as a way of escaping any "alleged determinism" or "pessimism" that may trouble feminists as the outcome of privileging psychoanalytic models of film study. Still echoing poststructuralist admonitions against empiricism, suspect "notions of referentiality," and "unproblematical" observations about representations of women with reference to the "real," Doane subsumes history, or more precisely, temporality, as a problematic within or encompassed by psychoanalysis (79). Specifically, she equates (film) history with the "problem of memory" and thus enlarges our understanding of resistance as "evidence of the subjectivity of this historian, her desire" (88–89). But it seems to me that Doane has come full circle, that is, by arguing so adroitly against the assertion that feminist psychoanalytic theory has reached an impasse, she illustrates its limitations. Briefly, psychoanalytic models of the spectator as textual constructs in an undifferentiated system of patriarchy—the latter a category Elizabeth Fox-Genovese labels as "mindlessly simplistic"—do not allow for analyses of audience reception in specific socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Further, the privileging and reification of texts, even in studies that demystify the cinematic apparatus, diminish human agency or the role of women and men who struggle to accomplish change in history. As Linda Williams comments in her review of *The Desire to Desire* for *The Journal of Film and Video*, Doane fails to account for the historical subject

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In "Remembering Women: Psychical and Historical Conclusions in Film Theory," the most problematical of the essays in the book, Doane rightly speculates about "the apparent exhaustion of psychoanalytic film theory" and the resulting "impasse" (80). Yet she cautions against any moves to dismantle or dethrone "theory" in favor of "history" as a way of escaping any "alleged determinism" or "pessimism" that may trouble feminists as the outcome of privileging psychoanalytic models of film study. Still echoing poststructuralist admonitions against empiricism, suspect "notions of referentiality," and "unproblematical" observations about representations of women with reference to the "real," Doane subsumes history, or more precisely, temporality, as a problematic within or encompassed by psychoanalysis (79). Specifically, she equates (film) history with the "problem of memory" and thus enlarges our understanding of resistance as "evidence of the subjectivity of this historian, her desire" (88–89). But it seems to me that Doane has come full circle, that is, by arguing so adroitly against the assertion that feminist psychoanalytic theory has reached an impasse, she illustrates its limitations. Briefly, psychoanalytic models of the spectator as textual constructs in an undifferentiated system of patriarchy—the latter a category Elizabeth Fox-Genovese labels as "mindlessly simplistic"—do not allow for analyses of audience reception in specific socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Further, the privileging and reification of texts, even in studies that demystify the cinematic apparatus, diminish human agency or the role of women and men who struggle to accomplish change in history. As Linda Williams comments in her review of *The Desire to Desire* for *The Journal of Film and Video*, Doane fails to account for the historical subject

and focuses instead on the "unchanging psychic structure of the unconscious" (Fall 1987, p. 45).

As opposed to subsuming notions about temporality within a psychoanalytic construct to avoid a polarization of history and theory, perhaps the very opposition that Doane seeks to elude is the appropriate place to begin a dialogue. B. Ruby Rich argued in a 1983 review of feminist scholarship in *American Film* that psychoanalytic film critics seldom cross disciplinary boundary lines, even under the ideological rubric of women's studies. Because the ascendancy of theory in film studies in general, and feminist film criticism in particular, has recently been questioned (but hardly reversed), film scholars should investigate history instead of construing it as a discipline that is somehow unproblematical and thus subject to their critical and imperialistic maneuvers. Doane, for instance, relies on Michel de Certeau's characterization of the past in historiography as "static, inert," "spatially isolated . . . in museums and archives" which "neutralize, sanitize its psychical impact" (91). Such an account of the past in both historical and historiographical literature would come as a surprise to all but the most naïve scholars engaged in writing history today. In fairness to Doane, it should be noted that her oversimplification of historiographical issues and of history as a discipline is hardly singular among film theorists or even film historians. Insofar as there are serious epistemological and methodological differences between film scholars and historians, these should be thoroughly explored rather than glossed over in responding to the injunction to historicize readings of texts.

Doane is much more successful in addressing the limitations of psychoanalytic feminist film theory and criticism in "Dark Continents: Epistemologies of Racial and Sexual Difference and the Cinema," a highly readable and thoughtful essay about the intersection of sexuality and racial identity. Drawing upon Frantz Fanon's (psycho)analysis of the colonial experience and focusing upon two significant texts of the classical cinema, *The Birth of a Nation* (D. W. Griffith, 1915) and *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, 1959), she defly maps out the complex coordinates of racial and sexual relations as signified by the black woman, the white woman, the black man, and the white man, and is especially insightful about the peculiar, invisible status of the black woman. Demonstration how psychoanalysis is relevant to the articulation of the network of power relations in which race relations are sexually charged, Doane carefully acknowledges in a footnote that she is focusing on the racial polarity of black vs. white, and not on the multiplicity of racial and ethnic identities in our culture. She is more comprehensive than in her previous essays and touches upon a wide range of related subjects, albeit briefly, such as biographical data about the relationship of Fannie Hurst and Zora Neale Hurston during the Harlem Renaissance. An attempt to articulate the relevance of psychoanalysis for issues such as race, ethnicity, and class that psychoanalytic feminist theorists have largely ignored to date, "Dark Continents" charts territory that should be further explored. Altogether, the essays in *Femmes Fatales* are successful in provoking thought about the directions—past, present, and future—of feminist critical practice.

SUMIKO HIGASHI

▪ Sumiko Higashi teaches at SUNY Brockport.

Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic
From *Caligari* to *Kuhle Wampe*

By Bruce Murray. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. $32.50 cloth; $14.95 paper.

Since the 1970s, much work in film studies has been explicitly radically leftist. Most scholars, however, have concentrated on critiques of dominant film practice. Historical studies of leftist film-making have been relatively uncommon and have created little stir, presumably due to a distrust of supposedly empiricist approaches. Books such as Russell Campbell's *Cinema Strikes Back: Radical Filmmaking in the United States 1930–1942* (1982), Bert Hogenkamp's *Deadly Parallels: Film and the Left in Britain 1928–1939* (1986), and Jonathan Buchsbaum's *Cinema Engagé: Film in the Populist Front* (1988) are based on patient traversals of the radical press and perusals of rare films.

Bruce Murray's *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic* belongs to this genre of historical studies. Murray has examined the coverage of film in journals affiliated with the Kommunistiche Partei Deutschlands and the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, as well as in the more mainstream press. He analyzes leftist and liberal films and draws upon archival collections to trace their impact. As one of the first books on the subject in English, Murray's work provides a useful introduction.

Each section of *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic* begins helpfully with a succinct summary of the convoluted political history of the years

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Each section of *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic* begins helpfully with a succinct summary of the convoluted political history of the years

covered. One of the book's strengths is a series of surveys of attitudes toward the cinema expressed in the Social Democratic and Communist party press. Murray finds that up to about 1924 both parties concentrated on criticizing the mainstream film industry. The possibility of fostering alternative film-making arose only in the middle of the decade. Murray also describes important left film groups like the Communist-based production and distribution firm Prometheus and the club Volksfilmverband. Prometheus was particularly active, circulating Soviet films in Germany and making such films as *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (1929) and *Kühle Wampe* (1932; the film was finished by another company when Prometheus folded).

The book's usefulness is marred, however, by a number of problems. A minor one is that Murray simply translates the German titles of films, especially Soviet ones, directly into English, rather than using the standard English titles. Thus Eisenstein's *Old and New*, released as *Der Kampf um die Erde*, becomes *The Struggle for the Earth*, and Room's *Die Todesbarke* is rendered as *The Death Barge* rather than the familiar *Death Bay*. Moreover, despite Murray's extensive research in contemporary print and primary sources, his sketchy use of modern secondary sources leads to mistakes and omissions. For example, he relies upon George Huaco's interview with Erich Pommer in *The Sociology of Film Art*, which perpetuates the idea that *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* had a disastrous premiere in the autumn of 1919 and succeeded only after Pommer created a clever ad campaign. In fact, the film was shot in the winter of 1919–20 and premiered to instant success in February of 1920, as can be seen from contemporary sources such as the *Lichtbildbühne* and recent German histories and reference books. Similarly, Universal did not take part in the loan made to UFA in 1926 by Paramount and MGM and did not become a partner in the Paraufamet distribution firm, as Murray suggests.

Murray's approach derives in part from Peter Bächlin's 1945 Marxist study, *Der Film als Ware*, and in part on Dieter Prokop's more recent work. He presupposes a sharp split between a radical independent cinema and a standardized bourgeois cinema that supports the status quo. Individual creative freedom, suppressed in the Weimar film industry, is seen as vital to leftist film-making.

Yet one remarkable aspect of Weimar-era cinema was the extent to which leftist and experimental film-making interacted with the mainstream industry. Programs of experimental shorts played in UFA theaters, some Soviet films became big hits, and people such as Walter Ruttman, Hans Richter, and Oskar Fischinger did free-lance work for the big studios. Murray's approach, however, allows for virtually no interaction between his two separate spheres. For example, he dismisses *Berlin* as having been made by Fox Europa as a quota quickie, while contemporary sources indicate that it was a prestige production, widely exported.

Murray begins by describing the controversial banning and subsequent release of *Potemkin* in Germany in 1926, claiming that these events and the history of Prometheus, the film's distributor, have been "forgotten" by film historians. He then cites an extensive list of German secondary sources that in fact cover Prometheus to some extent. He ignores, however, important English-language articles dealing with Prometheus: David Welch's "The Proletarian Cinema and the Weimar Republic" (*Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television*, vol. 1, no. 1 [1981]); Vance Kepley, "The Workers' International Relief and the Cinema of the Left, 1921–1935" (*Cinema Journal*, vol. 23, no. 1 [1983]); and Denise Hartsough, "Soviet Film Distribution and Exhibition in Germany, 1921–1933" (*Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television*, vol. 5, no. 2 [1985]).

This book also fails to relate its topic to the rise of leftist cinema elsewhere. Germany was among the first countries outside the U.S.S.R. where leftist film-making emerged, but the process was also an international one. In 1925, Communists helped form the London Film Society, which also faced censorship when showing Soviet films. Workers' clubs were soon making films in Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. There would be no need for Murray to detail such activities, but a brief mention of pertinent secondary sources would at least place the Weimar leftists prominently within this larger phenomenon.

In addition, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic* needs a stronger, more original argument. Murray states that these significant events have been forgotten and that they warrant attention. He lays out five assumptions, based on Bächlin and Prokop, including "Commercial cinematic entertainment responds to and, to a large extent, fosters the abstract regressive needs of petty-bourgeois film spectators" (10). He proposes to see whether such assumptions reflect the situation of Weimar-era leftist cinema. Murray concludes that leftist film-makers fought to create an alternative to the rightist-dominated industry but were defeated by the rise of the Nazis and other reactionary parties. The assumptions fit well, since the position is not argued but simply mapped onto data selected to support it.

Such a straightforward application of these assumptions mars the analyses of individual films. Murray assumes that certain techniques are innately bourgeois and hence should not be used by leftist film-makers. For example, because commercial films have many

intertitles, he criticizes a Social Democratic film for relying on them. He also seeks to determine which characters we are being made to identify with; if they're workers, it's a good film; if they're not, it's commercial and bourgeois. This approach makes for simple, not very interesting analyses. KRISTIN THOMPSON

▪ Kristin Thompson is an Honorary Fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Film and the Working Class
The Feature Film in British and American Society

By Peter Stead. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1989. $15.95 paper.

Peter Stead's *Film and the Working Class* is an intervention in academic film studies as welcome as it is unexpected. Despite the recent controversies surrounding the putative infiltration of humanities programs by curricula promoting previously unrepresented classes, races, and genders, attention to class has in fact been conspicuous primarily for its absence. This has been especially true for film studies where, since the post-1968 critical reconsideration of early Soviet theory in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and then *Screen* was deflected into Lacanian psychoanalysis, the only social specificity discoverable within either text or spectator has been that of sexual difference. Preoccupied by bourgeois feminism, the discipline has until very recently been entirely oblivious or hostile to considerations of race and, apart from isolated exceptions, it has been as resistant to consideration of class difference as it has to any Marxism save the most abstracted Althusserianism. Any attempt to place class on the critical agenda is, then, an occasion of real importance. Expecially in as useful a study as this.

Despite the promise of the main title, the subtitle is a more accurate guide to the book's actual undertaking. Aside from a couple of lines on the Workers' Film and Photo League, there is no reference to the history of attempts by the working class to make their own film and hardly any attention to labor struggles within the film industry. Rather, the book synoptically surveys the depiction of working-class life in the British and United States cinema industries, alternating chapters or sections of chapters treating the two national cinemas chronologically.

This history is presented largely, though not exclusively, in nontheoretical terms; there's absolutely no reference to Marxist or any other modern film theory and, a couple of incidental references to Raymond Williams aside, no reference to British cultural studies. The charting of the presence or absence of working-class characters, working-class milieux, and pro-working class messages in British and U.S. feature films is, however, interspersed with occasional comments about the relation of given films to historical actuality and about the conditions of their popular reception. In this last area, Stead appeals not so much to a model of a politically correct film but rather to reconstructions of reception; typically he supports his hypotheses about the social meaning of a given film or era by a tapestry of journalistic accounts, novelistic recreations, popular controversies, and the like. His methodology here, perhaps unconsciously, parallels the Birmingham School's turn to Gramsci's models of the popular negotiation of cultural meanings; at any rate, an ongoing subtext to the book is a history of the phenomenology of spectatorship and of the way film has been used by the working class, often in ways unpredicted by or even counter to the polemics of left intellectuals. This very usefully supplies Stead's whole sense of how film and the working class may be related. For, despite its ostensible modesty, his project is informed by an underlying thematics, a theory of why the cinemas it considers have been as they were.

Though not presented in schematic form, the primary components of this theory are as follows: first a historical narrative, plotted in respect to film's engagement—or nonengagement—with working-class culture; second, a set of criteria that make films "work" or not, what makes them pleasurable, particularly to working-class people (though, apart from attitudes to such class-specific events as strikes, the book generally assumes that film spectatorship is not class specific); third, within and subtending this, a theory of the role of entertainment in industrial capitalism. A final chapter in the book resumes the entire history and foregrounds these ideas, making explicit the "ideology" that informs it throughout.

As an overview of films that in some way or other depict working-class people, the book is detailed, comprehensive, lucid, and frequently inspirational. It is in general nonsectarian and therefore (as much as any book that concerns the working class can be) nonpolemical, with a broadness to its sympathies that is absolutely essential at this point in the study it initiates. Stead's legwork is impressive; it has enabled him to compile what is at the very least a historically organized, fully annotated basic filmography of the field. The fullness of his references tend to fall off after the mid-

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sixties, and doubtless every reader will come up with films since then that Stead has missed; but for providing a basic introduction, accessible and nonpedantic, it's hard to see how this could have been substantially bettered.

The story of cinema these films tell runs essentially as follows: In the primitive era, film's rudimentary narratives grew out of social settings broadly familiar to the still mostly working-class clientele, and the medium displayed a capacity for realism all the more remarkable given the increasing orientation of more established art forms away from realism and mass accessibility. With the consolidation of the studios and the move to Hollywood, film developed its own aspirations of class mobility, both by developing more luxurious theaters and also by significantly shifting its subject matter to make it more attractive to the middle-class audience. It retained its interest in popular themes, but tended to set them in idealized versions of the past or in upbeat versions of contemporary city life, establishing that "world of entertainment" which was thereafter always accepted as Hollywood's distinctive creation" (234).

The aporias that follow—why, for example, working-class audiences continued to prefer films that had everything to gain and nothing to lose by preserving the political status quo—are those of ideology itself, and while Stead in general preserves rather than confronts them, in his last pages he does reassemble his key concepts (the compromised politics of the studios, the gratification of mass audiences, the importance of convincing actors) to suggest a kind of master narrative of films as a whole—his (much more optimistic) version of Adorno's thesis that, whatever their plot, all films tell the same story. For Adorno that story was the triumph of invested capital; for Stead it is the "success myth," the fantasy of class mobility closely allied with specifically American economic expectations. This thesis has (as Stead recognizes) already been advanced by Chuck Kleinhans, but Stead takes it one stage further. Hollywood was able successfully to negotiate "the minefield of class" (239) by using, as the vehicle for tales of individual success, attractive star actors who had themselves achieved the promised class mobility: "the fictional success of heroes and heroines was realistically depicted by attractive and yet ordinary Americans who had obviously themselves started out on farms, in small towns, or in anonymous neighbourhoods" (241). In short (though Stead would not phrase it this way), the film business succeeded, not in representing life, but in rewriting all life as allegories of itself. DAVID JAMES

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The Films of Carlos Saura
The Practice of Seeing

By Marvin D'Lugo. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. $45.00 cloth; $14.95 paper.

Finally there is a book, in English, dedicated to the career of Carlos Saura. Saura is, of course, the fellow that comes between Luis Buñuel and Pedro Almodóvar in the list of the only Spanish directors most Americans know. The book is a highly welcome and serviceable study of a major world-class director. Marvin D'Lugo presents explanatory analysis as well as biographical and historical information for all Saura films from the ironical travelogue *Cuenca* of 1958 to *La noche oscura (The Dark Night)* of 1989.

D'Lugo decides that Saura's fundamental visual and conceptual strategy is to depict repeatedly "the framework of a social and political system that has already assigned fixed meanings to individual and collective experience." This framework is brought about by Spanish history, religion, a collective national psyche, and often, in many films, by the politics of the regime of Francisco Franco, which is indirectly presented but inevitably present. Against this socially generated perspective, Saura counterposes the more uncontaminated views of characters who are in some way outsiders. By establishing another perspective for the viewer, these outsiders create a "discursive resistance," which questions established meaning. It is this technique, and the variations Saura creates based on it, that are essentially the "practice of seeing" which is referred to in the subtitle of the book. Aficionados of Saura's films will readily recognize these discursive resistances in such characters as the governess Ana in *Ana y los lobos*, the man/child Luis in *La prima Angélica*, the child Ana in *Cría cuervos*, Elvira in *El Dorado*, and so on. The ultimate purpose of these alternate perspectives is to cause a distancing between spectator and film which will lead to a questioning of the society depicted.

Critics both favorable and unfavorable to Saura have for a long time understood that the director has a tendency to construct many of his films around allegorical symbols depicting Spain's collective vices and victimized individuals. What is new here is that D'Lugo explores the technique from one Saura film to the next until all are done. While certainly informative, the book might be perhaps more enjoyable, if that is not too much to ask of an academic work, if the discussions were more thematically arranged rather than presented work by work through 22 films. In addition, the book

sixties, and doubtless every reader will come up with films since then that Stead has missed; but for providing a basic introduction, accessible and nonpedantic, it's hard to see how this could have been substantially bettered.

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By Marvin D'Lugo. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. $45.00 cloth; $14.95 paper.

Finally there is a book, in English, dedicated to the career of Carlos Saura. Saura is, of course, the fellow that comes between Luis Buñuel and Pedro Almodóvar in the list of the only Spanish directors most Americans know. The book is a highly welcome and serviceable study of a major world-class director. Marvin D'Lugo presents explanatory analysis as well as biographical and historical information for all Saura films from the ironical travelogue *Cuenca* of 1958 to *La noche oscura (The Dark Night)* of 1989.

D'Lugo decides that Saura's fundamental visual and conceptual strategy is to depict repeatedly "the framework of a social and political system that has already assigned fixed meanings to individual and collective experience." This framework is brought about by Spanish history, religion, a collective national psyche, and often, in many films, by the politics of the regime of Francisco Franco, which is indirectly presented but inevitably present. Against this socially generated perspective, Saura counterposes the more uncontaminated views of characters who are in some way outsiders. By establishing another perspective for the viewer, these outsiders create a "discursive resistance," which questions established meaning. It is this technique, and the variations Saura creates based on it, that are essentially the "practice of seeing" which is referred to in the subtitle of the book. Aficionados of Saura's films will readily recognize these discursive resistances in such characters as the governess Ana in *Ana y los lobos*, the man/child Luis in *La prima Angélica*, the child Ana in *Cría cuervos*, Elvira in *El Dorado*, and so on. The ultimate purpose of these alternate perspectives is to cause a distancing between spectator and film which will lead to a questioning of the society depicted.

Critics both favorable and unfavorable to Saura have for a long time understood that the director has a tendency to construct many of his films around allegorical symbols depicting Spain's collective vices and victimized individuals. What is new here is that D'Lugo explores the technique from one Saura film to the next until all are done. While certainly informative, the book might be perhaps more enjoyable, if that is not too much to ask of an academic work, if the discussions were more thematically arranged rather than presented work by work through 22 films. In addition, the book

assumes an interpretive stance that does not seem to permit much uncertainty or irony to come through about the interpretations themselves. This trait may be the shared responsibility of director and author, for try as D'Lugo does to sound appropriately postmodernist in his analysis, perhaps it is the allegorical aspect of Saura which strongly tends to lock content into a rather fixed procedure for arriving at some sort of understanding.

Another observation of the critical tactic of the book involves the way the word "Saura" is at times used. While D'Lugo rejects speaking about an "oracular" director and states that he prefers Foucault's concept of an "author-function," the reader will nevertheless find statements such as these, for example, from the discussion of *Stress es tres, tres*: "His problems, Saura would have us believe, derive from the mask of modernity that Fernando assumes in an effort, ironically, to resolve the crises of his life, . . ." or, "Depriving Fernando of the privilege of enunciation that was so decisive in the development of Julián, Saura, instead, endows his character with the organizing consciousness of a metteur-en-scène, . . ." In situations like these the reader is left not clearly knowing whether the "Saura" referred to is indeed an oracular director, an author-function, or whether it is really Saura, himself, who is claiming to carry out these actions, since D'Lugo did interview the director prior to writing and may have received this information directly from him.

That said, taking the book's approach for what it is, the discussions of individual films are essentially sound and often remarkably perceptive. Well handled are the early films such as *Los golfos, La caza*, and *Peppermint frappé*. Within the course of Spanish cinema the first two films were powerful, visceral statements and the third presented a fresh new treatment of the collision between old and new Spain. D'Lugo provides them with the appreciation they deserve. Nicely done also are the analyses of *La prima Angélica* and *El Dorado* among the middle and later works. Especially illuminating is the study of *Cría cuervos*; D'Lugo provides a psychologically perceptive portrait of the protagonist and her specific home and national environment. In the discussion of *Bodas de sangre (Blood Wedding)*, the news event that is the original source for the artistic treatments, the immortal Lorca tragedy, the Antonio Gades dance version, and the Saura film are effectively linked. Insightful and subtle attention is also brought to how masterfully Saura controls mise-en-scène. Weaker is the analysis of *Carmen*, which dwells heavily on Saura's use of clichés about Spain (certainly a theme in the film) but which tends to look too little at gender relations and the interplay between artist and subject (although the presence of these forces is mentioned). *Carmen* is especially great and noteworthy because in it, Saura, who can often be "Spain-bound," created a cleverly subtle work with referents that go beyond Spain, but that aspect of the film does not come out in the commentary.

D'Lugo does do an excellent job of staking out Saura's major periods, placing individual films within the director's phases, and making Saura comprehensible as a self-contained entity, an auteur. Whether one favors the auteur concept or not, the fact is that Saura does try hard to be a stylist apart. As D'Lugo underscores, albeit perhaps a bit too strongly, Saura was "forced to improvise and invent the cinematic traditions that are taken for granted in the rest of Europe and America." When this activity is tied in with a desire to symbolize material in order to slip it past censors and at the same time acquire recognition among the more intellectual audiences that frequent film festivals, as well as big-city and college-town international movie theaters, the result is a willful, auteur style of cinema. Francoist critics were on to something when they let Saura get away with certain things because they were aware that he was being viewed mostly by an educated elite that had already made up its mind about Spain's dictatorship.

As is often the case in books of this type, there is a tendency toward hagiography that is forgivable in part because at his best, as in the early works already mentioned, as well as in *El jardín de las delicias, La prima Angélica, Cría*, and the popular *Carmen*, Saura can create richly textured works, beautiful to look at and analyze. It must be said, however, that he can also be obvious or maudlin. One need not look only to *Antonieta* or *Lament for a Bandit* (among the very few films D'Lugo does not actually seem to love). These negative qualities are often visible in the more highly regarded works, for example, *Ana y los lobos* and in the director's most recent work, *Ay Carmela!* which D'Lugo was not able to treat but whose climax is symptomatic. Saura's high moral tone is a fine quality but how effectively it is presented is not often questioned.

Something that could have added more variety to the book would have been more in-depth sections devoted to the intellectual, cinematic, and political world inhabited by Saura. D'Lugo deals with these subjects, at times even at length, but one is left feeling that something needs to be explored or questioned further. The Saura depicted seems, like certain Saura protagonists, to be too heroically alone. Was input and influence from others as minimal as it sometimes seems? It must be asked, was Saura's view of film the only legitimate path? How much influence has Saura actually had on Spanish film? This book will not help correct the American notion that the only Spanish director worthy

of consideration during the period is Saura, an assessment of which many Spanish cinéastes would strongly disagree.

Unquestionably, however, D'Lugo hits many major points and analyzes cogently far more often than not. A reader cannot help but come away with considerable knowledge of Saura and his work. Yet a more critical work of the director's effective relation to others and to the entire Spanish narrative aesthetic of the era is still needed, while at the same time, it must be said, D'Lugo has provided a formidable start to an English-speaking public's deeper awareness of a major film artist.

ANTONIO VARELA

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The Films of G. W. Pabst
An Extraterritorial Cinema

Edited by Eric Rentschler. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990. $45.00 cloth; $17.95 paper.

The Films of G. W. Pabst: An Extraterritorial Cinema arose out of an international symposium considering the work of Austrian-born film director Georg Wilhelm Pabst (1885–1967). Each of the 17 essays addresses a single film directed by Pabst, including such widely known works as *The Joyless Street* (1925), *Pandora's Box* (1929), *The Threepenny Opera* (1931), and *Kameradschaft* (1931), but also addressing films less frequently exhibited and taught in the United States, such as *The Modern Hero* (1934, USA), *Shanghai Drama* (1938, France), *Paracelsus* (1943, Germany), and *The Last Ten Days* (1955, Germany). A biography and detailed filmography for Pabst and an extensive bibliography conclude the volume.

The inclusion of the appendices as well as the book's title and the photograph of Pabst on the cover point to the anthology's orientation as an authorship study. Individual authors justify consideration of the director as an auteur for the thematic and stylistic unities they find in Pabst's films. For example, editor Eric Rentschler argues in the introduction that "Viewed as a whole, Pabst's films feature men with deficient egos and indeterminate identities governed by frenzy, anxiety, irresolution" (12); he further identifies a recurrent tale of male desire for an idealized image of woman (17). Other contributors find a recurrent theme of incestuous desire (Jan-Christopher Horak, 166), stylized explorations of "the shadowy space between art and prostitution" (Karsten Witte, 168), and the "lack of a stable subjectivity" (Karl Sierek, 125) in many films directed by Pabst.

These moments in the anthology recall structuralist auteur theories of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which detected a cinematic auteur in central meanings and thematic motifs that might be recognized across the body of a director's work. However, the anthology does not yield the unified composite image of director and oeuvre that authorship approaches usually strive to attain. The essays most consistently characterize the director as a skilled film worker innovative in the use of editing, cinematography, and sound; the term "fluid" recurs as a description of these techniques in films directed by Pabst. The anthology's secondary title, "an extraterritorial cinema," suggests its central thesis: Pabst's own fluidity, even slipperiness, as a subject, particularly in view of the oft-remarked stylistic variations and ideological ambiguities in Pabst's films, which were directed in five countries and under three successive German governments.

Paradoxically, it is precisely Pabst's indeterminancy, the very basis of the director's long-standing problematic positioning in film histories dominated by auteur and national cinema approaches, that occasions his reexamination here as auteur. Pabst evolves in Rentschler's introduction from "film history's ultimate nowhere man" (1) to "one of film history's premiere displaced persons" (4) to "an *auteur* subject to history and bound to its workings for all his idiosyncracies of style, volition, and personality" (23). The latter provocative formulation functions to an extent as an interested rewriting of auteur theories as a point of departure from which to redress Pabst's critical decline.

A statement in Rentschler's preface expresses the ambivalence toward Pabst that underlies the anthology:

> . . . this book took shape as a case study, not a festschrift; an appreciation but not exactly a celebration, the exploration of a peripatetic career and its curious trajectory. (vii)

The phrasing at once tenders and dismisses Pabst as subject, challenges and perpetuates the valorized status of the individual artist. The ambivalence the statement expresses is not limited to Pabst as a particular auteur, but devolves on auteurism more generally. Rentschler proposes the term "extraterritorial" as an apt description of Pabst's life and work. Yet G. W. Pabst can be understood as "extraterritorial" only if one presumes as an organizing principle of film history an individual author/director *normally* bound to a delineated geographical, institutional, or stylistic territory.

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The anthology as a whole yields more than the title promises, however, for by and large its contributions do not depart from auteurist assumptions, but rather from

a variety of paradigms that locate films directed by Pabst within a complex abstract "territory" in which all media texts operate—the historicized contexts of their discursive production and reception. Notwithstanding the prevalence of the director's name as unifying subject of the anthology, its overall tone is decidedly post-structuralist: the volume traces the fluctuations and permutations of "Pabst" as a historically circumscribed, ambiguous sign, rather than as an individual artist to be identified or a body of work to be delimited. The cumulative effect is a possible response to a 20-year-old call among film critics for a discursive conceptualization of cinematic authorship. Indeed, the assembled essays suggest a model for future authorship-oriented studies of work by film-makers who are ostensibly politically and aesthetically less variable or ambiguous than Pabst.

The particular strength and originality of the collection lies in the historicized approaches taken in many of the essays, integrating semiotic analysis and psychoanalytic and feminist approaches with close consideration of the initial production and reception of the subject films. A number of the essays consider Pabst's direction of screenplays based on novels and other literary sources and offer intertextual readings that comparatively investigate the technical, stylistic, and ideological workings of related texts. David Bathrick demonstrates that Pabst's 1927 realization of Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg's 1923 novel, *The Love of Jeanne Ney*, did not so much, as critics have often charged, transform "the historical into the melodramatic" (60) as bring into focus the melodramatic structure of the original, organized around an essentialized, trans-historical figure of woman. Heide Schlüpmann discusses *Diary of a Lost Girl* (1929) as a representation of prostitution "divested of the naturalistic trappings and historical specificity of social drama" (81) which characterized the popular 1905 novel by Margarethe Böhme on which the film was based; she finds strong influences of playwright Frank Wedekind's "stylization of the brothel as an Arcadian space" (83) in the film's simultaneous manifestation of critical realism and sadistic voyeurism.

Thomas Elsaesser argues that critical accusations that Pabst's direction of *The Threepenny Opera* (1931) psychologized the Brechtian plot are unwarranted; rather, he sees in the film a visualization of Brecht's verbal critique of the bourgeois family, a parody that exposes "the duplicity of representation itself, and of filmic representation in particular" (107). Anne Friedberg demonstrates that *Secrets of a Soul* (1926) afforded the psychoanalysts who collaborated on the script an opportunity "to extol the curative virtues" of psychoanalysis and gave screenwriter Hans Neumann and director Pabst an occasion "to exploit the hermeneutic similarities between the work of psychoanalysis and the act of cinema spectatorship" (51).

Contributions by Patrice Petro on *The Joyless Street*, Anke Gleber on *Die Komödianten* (1941), and Marc Silberman on *The Last Ten Days* (1955) examine narrative functions and ideological effects of melodramatic structures. How individual films directed by Pabst construct their protagonists—and their spectators—as engendered subjects is a key issue in solidly argued contributions by Horak, Witte, Russel Berman, and Gertrud Koch. Berman concludes that the timid tone of the appeal in *Kameradschaft* to socialist internationalism can be understood as a consequence of the film's staging of masculine libidinal repression: the film calls workers to unite "not in struggle with the bourgeoisie, but in a struggle to control nature" (120), a threat which Berman sees equated in the film both with unchecked male homoeroticism and the undisciplined female crowd. Witte and Koch analyze how narrative and style in two films Pabst directed in France in the 1930s historically circumscribe the protagonists not only as engendered subjects, but also as political outsiders, as exiles.

The geographical and professional range of contributors—free-lance critics and university scholars of film and German literary history working in the U.S., Germany, Austria, Great Britain, and Israel—is a further strength of the anthology in its providing an international tone and diversity of scholarly perspectives in keeping with the theme of "extraterritorialism." But the volume does have some unevenness. A few essays depart from an overgeneralized national literary or political context rather than from a solid understanding of popular culture as complex historical discourse, and make unfounded assertions about the comparative film historical positioning of Pabst-directed films or Pabst as a technician.

In its attention to specific historical connections between literary and cinematic texts, the volume recalls another anthology edited by Rentschler, *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations* (New York: Methuen, 1986). The substantial value of the present anthology lies in its obliquely proffered revisions to auteurist approaches to film history. Individual essays are of certain interest to scholars and teachers considering specific films directed by Pabst in the context of national cinema or history courses, as well as to those addressing feminist perspectives on media and issues of cinematic spectatorship and visual pleasure.

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From Hanoi to Hollywood
The Vietnam War in American Film

Edited by Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990. $45.00 cloth; $14.95 paper.

As the second Vietnam War, the one fought on American movie and television screens, seems at last to be winding down, as George Bush declares that the United States has "kicked the Vietnam syndrome" in the wake of the American military's murderously bloody (unless you watched it on television) devastation of Iraq, can there be any doubt that the complexities of the present are only illuminated by working to make sense of the past? *From Hanoi to Hollywood* is an excellent anthology of 19 essays (several initially written for a 1988 conference on the war film held at the University of Massachusetts-Boston) which chronicle the interpretive strategies utilized by American commerical and independent film-makers to explain the Vietnam War. The topics cover a relatively broad discursive range—from Newsreel to Chuck Norris—but they are linked by a common belief that Vietnam's lingering but increasingly diffuse presence in the public consciousness makes it imperative that we look at the rhetorical and ideological terms under which our collective sense of the war has been framed. The past, that is, visits itself upon the present in many forms, and this book represents an attempt at summarizing (circa 1988) some of the ways in which Vietnam has been considered in the popular imagination over the last two decades. The thesis of the project is state concisely when editors Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud argue in their introduction:

> Put simply, at issue are the ways culture in general and film in particular are complicit in social and political efforts to bring about acceptance of existing power relations. Applied to the specific case of Vietnam War films, the thrust of this volume is to suggest that most of the films under discussion work to reaffirm those same beliefs that the war threw into doubt, and that they do so by observing, not illuminating, the painfully unresolved feelings Americans still have about the war. (7)

Louis Althusser's name is mentioned only once in the book, but work building on his consideration of the social and political repercussions of the avowedly apolitical apparatuses of capitalist culture—including those of the entertainment industry—provides one of its primary underlying methodological and thematic foundations. The vast majority of Vietnam films, it is proposed, have presented viewers with different kinds of emotional catharsis, largely at the expense of more systematic analyses of the complex political and moral circumstances within which the war was fought. Most of these movies seek what all mainstream movies seek—closure—and this narrative convention serves its usual purpose of confirming the validity of the societal status quo. As several essays here point out, however, in the ideological minefield of Hollywood's Vietnam movies, closure has the effect of closing off discussion of (for instance) who or what is to blame for the war as soon as that discussion reaches the intellectual speed of a Sgt. Rock comic book, thereby short-circuiting the possibility of using these films to directly or indirectly critique the policy-making institutions that shaped the Southeast Asian terrordome in their own paranoid, historically myopic images. That the vast majority of mainstream Hollywood product is complicit with the good old dominant ideology is not exactly news; but if the war movie historically has been the genre most overtly tied to issues relating to matters of national identity and policy which have a material effect on the lives of its audiences, its complicity in relation to Vietnam is especially troubling. The authors in this anthology generally argue that the movies' very particular rewriting of the history of the war serves the larger purposes of the White House and defense establishments, who clearly have a vested interest in convincing a majority of Americans that Vietnam was, as that renowned historian Ronald Reagan put it, "a noble cause." Dittmar and Michaud suggest that ". . . Vietnam films also interact with the history that is in formation at the time of their production and, thus, anticipate a history yet to come. In this respect, their looking backward serves contemporary political and ideological agendas" (12).

The book is divided into four sections. The first provides a series of overviews of the place of Vietnam in American cinematic representation and of that representation in the context of the American political economy. In this part of the book especially, some of the same films (e.g., *Platoon, Full Metal Jacket, Apocalypse Now, In the Year of the Pig, Hearts and Minds*) are discussed recurrently, from sometimes complementary but often strikingly divergent perspectives. Rather than bogging the reader down in contradictory readings that cancel each other out, though, this mosaic structure becomes one of the strengths of the anthology. The authors tend to illuminate each other's analyses by tacitly engaging in a round-table dialogue on Vietnam representation, which has the salutory effect of demonstrating the complexity of the issues under discussion.

The other three sections of the book consist mainly of close readings of individual films or groups of films. Part 2 is devoted to analyses of several of the more

high-profile commercial blockbusters, including *Missing in Action, Rambo 2*, and *The Deer Hunter*. Part Three discusses "the representation of minorities, women, the disabled, and veterans," drawing on issues raised by films ranging from *Platoon* and *Coming Home* to *Cutter's Way* and *The Night of the Living Dead*. Part 4 deals with the ways in which documentary film-makers have read the war; here again, a strikingly wide range of material is examined, including the work of the Newsreel collective, *In the Year of the Pig*, and *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*.

From Hanoi to Hollywood should quickly become the standard text on the relationship between the Vietnam War and the movies that have tried to explain it. The chapter notes and two appendices (an extensive filmography and a thoughtfully constructed chronology of the DNA-like interweaving of the movies and historical events from 1954 to 1988) will serve students and teachers alike as useful resource guides. The book's various authors and analytical perspectives are linked by a rigorous attention to the intricacies of the relationship between movies and the economic, political, and cultural contexts in which they are produced. In one sense, the cumulative effect of these essays is depressing—they demonstrate over and over again the missed opportunities and distortions of history (willful and otherwise) that have characterized the vast majority of American cinematic encounters with Vietnam. But their effect is also energizing. There is an undercurrent of quiet anger and determination that runs throughout this anthology, an anger directed at the cynicism and inhumanity of the war planners of the Reagan/Bush era no less than those of the Johnson/Nixon years, and a determination to demonstrate that any academic scholarship worth the name must engage with the world in which *it* is produced, in this case by showing the importance of refusing to accept the dominant histories of the Vietnam War that have been offered so far. STEVE FORE

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The Gorgon's Gaze
German Cinema, Expression, and the Image of Horror

By Paul Coates. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. $49.50.

The rise of cultural and interdisciplinary studies has contributed more to recent film criticism than any other intellectual direction. Always pressured by those other cultural fields that inform the movies, cinema studies has seemed, nonetheless, to have retreated critically and academically over the last couple of decades into the borders of its own terminologies, histories, and texts. Especially in this context, the intellectual scope and flexibility of Paul Coates' *The Gorgon's Gaze* provokes the kind of questions (about reading cultural history within movies, for instance) and suggests the sorts of historical interactions (across literature and film, for instance) that mobilize some of the best work in current film studies. The book proposes to drift "quite deliberately between separate domains: philosophy, sociology, psychoanalysis, literary theory, German studies, Polish studies, and, of course, film theory itself" (ix). In this, it is a remarkably inventive and unusually serious engagement with an image that is rarely given the cultural weight it deserves.

The majority, but not all, of the material here relates to German cinema, hardly an arbitrary terrain since these films represent the most traumatic cultural trajector of this century. Starting with the celebrated and often discussed classics of the so-called Golden Age—*Faust, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, and *The Student of Prague*—Coates investigates, as part of a discussion of numerous other movies and works of literature, *Metropolis, The Blue Angel*, and *Nosferatu*. The central thematics of these analyses is the textual place and play of horror, The Other, the monstrosity, "the gorgon's gaze," and how those figures become violently repressed, uncannily displaced, or directly confronted across the narratives of twentieth-century culture. Obviously this strategy turns on a more subtle version of Kracauer's "Caligari-to-Hitler" formula as well as a recognition of the still reverberating consequences of a fascistic holocaust that has become the prominent nightmare haunting postwar Germany and other Western cultures. Before a somewhat idiosyncratic detour through "Expressionism in Ameria," where he details the not very startling discovery that movies such as *Citizen Kane, The Big Sleep*, and *Vertigo* engage in their own struggle with subjective nightmares within a realist world, Coates takes up some of the most renowned film-makers of the New German Cinema (Fassbinder, Herzog, Von Trotta, and others) who likewise contend with a more concrete and historicized image of their darker heritage. Finally, by way of Bergman's *Persona* and Polish film-maker Krzysztov Kieslowski's *A Short Film about Killing*, the argument develops its summary position around a discussion of Margarethe Von Trotta's *Marianne and Juliane* and its purportedly unique ability to "go beyond the terror of the dead" in order "to escape the confines of paranoia, with its obsessive will to visualize a tantalizing—haunt-

high-profile commercial blockbusters, including *Missing in Action, Rambo 2*, and *The Deer Hunter*. Part Three discusses "the representation of minorities, women, the disabled, and veterans," drawing on issues raised by films ranging from *Platoon* and *Coming Home* to *Cutter's Way* and *The Night of the Living Dead*. Part 4 deals with the ways in which documentary film-makers have read the war; here again, a strikingly wide range of material is examined, including the work of the Newsreel collective, *In the Year of the Pig*, and *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*.

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German Cinema, Expression, and the Image of Horror

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The rise of cultural and interdisciplinary studies has contributed more to recent film criticism than any other intellectual direction. Always pressured by those other cultural fields that inform the movies, cinema studies has seemed, nonetheless, to have retreated critically and academically over the last couple of decades into the borders of its own terminologies, histories, and texts. Especially in this context, the intellectual scope and flexibility of Paul Coates' *The Gorgon's Gaze* provokes the kind of questions (about reading cultural history within movies, for instance) and suggests the sorts of historical interactions (across literature and film, for instance) that mobilize some of the best work in current film studies. The book proposes to drift "quite deliberately between separate domains: philosophy, sociology, psychoanalysis, literary theory, German studies, Polish studies, and, of course, film theory itself" (ix). In this, it is a remarkably inventive and unusually serious engagement with an image that is rarely given the cultural weight it deserves.

The majority, but not all, of the material here relates to German cinema, hardly an arbitrary terrain since these films represent the most traumatic cultural trajector of this century. Starting with the celebrated and often discussed classics of the so-called Golden Age—*Faust, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, and *The Student of Prague*—Coates investigates, as part of a discussion of numerous other movies and works of literature, *Metropolis, The Blue Angel*, and *Nosferatu*. The central thematics of these analyses is the textual place and play of horror, The Other, the monstrosity, "the gorgon's gaze," and how those figures become violently repressed, uncannily displaced, or directly confronted across the narratives of twentieth-century culture. Obviously this strategy turns on a more subtle version of Kracauer's "Caligari-to-Hitler" formula as well as a recognition of the still reverberating consequences of a fascistic holocaust that has become the prominent nightmare haunting postwar Germany and other Western cultures. Before a somewhat idiosyncratic detour through "Expressionism in Ameria," where he details the not very startling discovery that movies such as *Citizen Kane, The Big Sleep*, and *Vertigo* engage in their own struggle with subjective nightmares within a realist world, Coates takes up some of the most renowned film-makers of the New German Cinema (Fassbinder, Herzog, Von Trotta, and others) who likewise contend with a more concrete and historicized image of their darker heritage. Finally, by way of Bergman's *Persona* and Polish film-maker Krzysztov Kieslowski's *A Short Film about Killing*, the argument develops its summary position around a discussion of Margarethe Von Trotta's *Marianne and Juliane* and its purportedly unique ability to "go beyond the terror of the dead" in order "to escape the confines of paranoia, with its obsessive will to visualize a tantalizing—haunt-

ingly—invisible threat" (220). Structured through the overlapping of a "shifting montage" that links an extraordinary amount of material from a spectrum of disciplines, the book ends with six appendices (taking up Wim Wenders and "the fear of the feminine," "Modernism and the body as machine," and other subjects)—these hanging oddly on the essayistic afterthoughts supposedly important enough to be undercurrents but not important enough to be integrated into the chapters they bear on.

There is something both seductive and inspiring about the vortex of analyses that the book sets in motion. There is also the feeling that discriminations get lost in the momentum of its thunderous critical voice. Often Coates illuminates films with exceptional confidence and originality: his movement through Heinrich Böll's *Billiards at Half-Past Nine* and Jean-Marie Straub's *Not Reconciled* to Von Trotta's *Marianne and Juliane* is a stunning example of what can be done with adaptation and an extraordinarily concise pinpointing of what is at work in all three texts. Conversely, the book takes far too much delight in replaying, in the guise of witty rhetoric, what have now become banal truisms about films and film-makers deserving, I believe, more careful thinking: claiming that Syberberg's *Our Hitler* is little more than "overgeneralized and self-indulgent mannerism" may ring true for the bandwagon of Syberberg detractors, but to characterize the majority of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* as the product of "a depressive Godfather, dragging around his limp puppets" (141) is the kind of flippant journalistic dismissal that even severe critics should have worked their way through by now. This is not simply the complaint that I would disagree with some of the readings and evaluations in this book (which is probably inevitable with any good book these days), but rather a concern for a more flexible sense of how history and culture (their parameters and possibilities, and the vastly different yardsticks required of, say, modernism and postmodernism) require more responsive terms and varied formulas than Coates' grid often allows. The book situates itself as an "extended colloquy with T. W. Adorno, Siegfried Kracauer, and Thomas Elsaesser"—all rich and provocative interlocutors but hardly enough legitimate contestants in a book as ambitious as this one.

While one of the chief virtues of this book is obviously its historical breadth and reach, film scholarship has made increasingly clear how sweeping categorizations can and do frequently miss the most meaningful swerves and distinctions that run against the mainstream of an encyclopedic model (described here largely by canonized films). Besides unexplained gaps (such as Nazi cinema) in its course through the twentieth century, the book treads much too lightly around the representational technologies, audience expectations, and cultural machinery which surely make, for instance, Brooks' Lulu in *Pandora's Box* (1928) and Hanna Schygulla's *Lili Marleen* (1980) quite historically distinct problems. Although Coates recognizes that these images operate in different historical registers, there is a presiding sense that they derive from a fundamental, almost transhistorical and transcultural structure for engaging horror across the cinematic gaze. Although Coates claims to be construing horror "both anthropologically and historically," his master plot is unflinchingly derived from Freudian and Lacanian models that identify the dynamics of the "horrific image" with a sexual/gender politics and tripartite arrangement. As suggestive as this may be, the calculus obviously limits the scope of an analysis of how horror is expressed and recuperated. The meanings and figures of horror are, I believe, always culturally contested fields, and a more careful look at how these have indeed been contested—before the Nazis, by Nazis, by postwar Americans, by Eastern European cultures (not to mention the Kierkegardian Bergman or the Roman Catholic Hitchcock)—would add considerable weight and nuance to Coates' argument.

An appendix: One of the more distracting practices in criticism today is the remaking of scholarly engagement into an opportunity to denigrate competing critical positions. There is too much of that in this book. That the targets of these attacks are often associated with a "radical feminism," which Coates would differentiate from his own less troublesome "feminine image," suggests that the demonizing rigidity of even the best critical mythologies needs to be carefully and suspiciously guarded against. TIMOTHY CORRIGAN

▪ Timothy Corrigan teaches at Temple University.

Green Eyes

By Marguerite Duras. Trans. Carol Barko. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990. $29.95.

Hélène Cixous, in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, ponders which French works might be called feminine. She concludes that the only inscriptions of femininity she has ever seen were by Colette, Marguerite Duras, and Jean Genet. In the recently translated *Green Eyes*, we find an example of the personal, Durassian style and of *l'écriture féminine* as Cixous delineates it.

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The work consists of a collection of essays on a variety of topics—philosophy, photography, politics, literature, films and film criticism, homosexuality, spectators, current events, personal memories and traumas, power, and women. Duras reflects on the process of writing and of film-making and on the relation between the two. The collection consists of 72 essays ranging in length from six lines (the opening "Letter") to 24 pages (a conversation with Elia Kazan, taken from the December 1980 issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma*). The bulk of the texts appeared in the June 1980 issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma*. In 1987, the same essays were published in book form by *Cahiers*, adding the conversation with Kazan along with a number of other articles.

We are informed in the translated "Foreword to the French Edition" that this new version in book form follows the author's wishes regarding page layout. This would possibly explain some of the changes of photographs accompanying the text, but not the lack of identification of those photos. Moreover, the porous paper used in the book form, coupled with the reduction of the photos, distorts the clarity and beauty of the images. In any format, however, the numerous shots of Delphine Seyrig express her character beautifully—her presence in this book serves as an additional posthumous tribute to her.

In her native language, Duras evinces a delicate blend of sarcasm, humor, and poetry in expressing her concerns and pain. Unfortunately, some of her subtlety is lost in translation. I am thinking, for example, of the essay "Le Spectateur." Undoubtedly in order to communicate the general sense of the French word, the translator chose "The Viewer" as the English title. To distance the English reader from "spectator," however, is to lose the importance of the screen as mirror, as reflecting surface, which is central to French film, literary, and psychoanalytic theory. Additionally, one loses another layer of meaning of the term, that of the *spécula(risa)tion* treated by Irigaray. Similarly, the power of the irony is weakened when references to psychoanalytic film theory are lost.

In translation, we are left with the impression that Duras is somehow puzzled as to what pleases the "average" spectator, whereas in French, her disdain and distrust for commercial film and film-makers ring out clearly. Although the Anglophone reader may lose sensitive linguistic points in this and other essays, the bitterness with which Duras regards the aforementioned as well as the "vast majority of critics" is still evident in translation.

She decries "capitalism's phenomenal pimping of the cinema from its beginnings. . . ." (100). She recognizes the irremedial distance between commercial film and the *cinéma d'auteur* with a stoicism reminiscent of the nineteenth-century French poets. For example, in "The Viewer," she comments: "This viewer is separate from us, from me. I know I will never reach him and I do not try to reach him. I know that nothing can change him, that he is unreachable. . . . We are face to face, in a permanent separateness" (14). In the same essay, she communicates the ironic mockery espoused by the misunderstood, unappreciated artist: "Let them drown in it, all together, the filmmakers and these original viewers. We are separate" (15).

Green Eyes is significant in various ways: It gives insights into that "space" from which Duras writes and films. ("The text, the equilibrium of the text, is in itself a space you have to rediscover" [7].) It gives insights into her thoughts and opinions on numerous subjects. One of the rewards of reading the essays is finding a brief insider's comment on artistic creativity nestled in the midst of a piece on an unrelated topic (e.g., "Classified Ads")—it is the unexpected gem which causes the reader to stop and reflect as well.

Film scholars might wish for more articles directly addressing film in the place of those dealing with French current events, literature, and politics. However, for those eager to understand the context in which Duras writes and her thoughts regarding artistic spheres, it is an invaluable tool. RUTH HOTTELL

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High-Class Moving Pictures

Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition, 1880-1920

By Charles Musser in collaboration with Carol Nelson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. $45.00.

High-Class Moving Pictures is a companion piece to and an extension of Carol Nelson's first-rate documentary film, *Lyman H. Howe's High-Class Moving Pictures* (released in 1983 and currently distributed by the Cinema Guild). It also serves as part of what could be called the Charles Musser project in early film history, along with Musser's *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (1991) and *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (1990). With the publication of these studies, Musser deserves to become a (maybe

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the) standard authority in this area of film studies. Like Musser's other two books, *High-Class Moving Pictures* is committed to accuracy, thoroughness, and specificity, while remaining clear and readable throughout. Above all, it is a work of eminently usable, accessible scholarship that should foster rather than foreclose further research, particularly into the exhibition and reception of motion pictures on the regional and local level. Even with all the information he so convincingly brings to light, with all the gaps he fills and misconceptions he corrects, Musser never presumes to have closed the book on traveling exhibition or American film history at large.

High-Class Moving Pictures is a self-styled "professional biography" that exhaustively follows the career of the entrepreneurial Lyman H. Howe of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, from his first attempts to exhibit a miniature coal mine in the mid-1880s through his phonograph concerts in the 1890s and then his 20-year career as a motion picture exhibitor. Although Howe is missing from virtually all previous surveys of the pre-1920 period, when I started examining the history of film exhibition in Lexington, Kentucky, the significance of Howe's semi-annual "Travel Festival" and "Lifeorama" programs became immediately apparent. The heavily promoted, well-attended engagements of Howe's "high-class moving pictures" at the Lexington Opera House were one of the more obvious indications that conventional accounts of moviegoing and film exhibition in the pre-nickelodeon and nickelodeon era were, at best, incomplete.

Various localities, most notably Wilkes-Barre, figure in *High-Class Moving Pictures*, and, understandably, they are viewed from the perspective of the traveling exhibitor. Musser's straightforward chronicle of Howe's professional career is painstakingly committed to getting the facts of this story as straight as possible. But *High-Class Moving Pictures* also moves horizontally (or synchronically) to situate Howe in the context of other traveling motion picture exhibitors, professional lecturers like E. Burton Holmes, and the ongoing documentary tradition in American screen practice. Film history, for Musser, requires this blend of chronicle and contextualization. It demands to be charted year by year (if not month by month) and must not be reduced to one line of development. Thus no matter how prominent Howe was, he simply cannot, according to *High-Class Moving Pictures*, be taken to represent all traveling exhibitors. As well as anyone, Musser makes the obvious (but nonetheless well worth repeating) point that the closer we look, the more interesting and complex—culturally, ideologically, and socially—the history of film production, exhibition, and reception becomes.

What we might call the historiographical authority of *High-Class Moving Pictures* comes not from sweeping speculative moves or an aggressively revisionist stance or a novelistic flair for narrative and description, but rather from the work of original research that is evident on every page of this study—all proof of Musser's exhaustive search for and through primary sources (archival material, personal scrapbooks, trade magazines, and local newspapers). Footnotes in traditional fashion document this search and, in fact, a range of "original" documents find their way into *High-Class Moving Pictures* as if to underscore the point that, for Musser, doing film history is first and foremost a matter of bringing to light long-ignored data. In addition to the obligatory photos of Howe and frame enlargements from the films he screened, Musser also reproduces contracts, decorative company stationery, handbills, and posters, and he quotes or recounts in much detail particular film programs, tour routes, box-office figures, and newspaper reviews. All this material (much of it drawn from privately owned scrapbooks) does more than merely illustrate or corroborate Musser's account: it spreads the historical wealth.

To call *High-Class Moving Pictures* a chronicle or to emphasize the way it relies on and foregrounds documents is not to say that it somehow manages to abjure or ignore interpretation. Several major themes or questions engage Musser at various points throughout the book. These concerns give *High-Class Moving Pictures* —implicitly, at least—a revisionist edge. For example, Musser makes a strong case for the creative, editorial role of the traveling exhibitor, who was "responsible for what is called 'postproduction' in modern film-making" (6), as evidenced by the way Howe's multi-film programs were arranged and presented to make use of state-of-the-art sound accompaniment. Such programs, which often featured views of thrilling "real-life" adventure, European royalty, militaristic spectacle, and colonialist enterprise functioned ideologically, Musser argues, as a "cinema of reassurance" (a concept he borrows from Neil Harris's study of John Philip Sousa). This interpretation at times tends to proceed too patly by stretching the notion of "reassurance" or by diminishing the contradictory diversity of many of Howe's programs, but Musser's speculations about this ideological agenda have interesting implications across the field of commercial entertainment from the 1890s through the 1910s.

Directly linked to this "ideology of reassurance" is Musser's characterization of the audiences that Howe and other traveling exhibitors sought to attract. These patrons could almost all be labeled middle class (or aspiring to middle-class status), yet according to *High-Class Moving Pictures* they comprised three distinct

"cultural clusters": a genteel, elite, refined culture; a conservative, Protestant church-oriented culture; and a "vibrant, commercial, urban popular culture" (9–10). Musser demonstrates how Howe, in the packaging and marketing of what he billed as "high-class moving pictures," attempted to serve as a mediator to all three of these cultural levels, and even managed at times to follow John Philip Sousa by "creating a new middle ground that would satisfy churchgoing traditionalists, amusement lovers, and believers in genteel cultivation" (168). We can argue with or refine the precise distinctions Musser offers, but some such reformulation of the "middle-class" audience is necessary for understanding the reception of movies in cities and towns outside of large metropolitan areas. And, as *High-Class Moving Pictures* proves, not just Lyman H. Howe but also his peers and his customers must be taken into account in any comprehensive history of the pre–World War I period.

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Hollywood in the Age of Television

Edited by Tino Balio. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990. $44.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.

Hollywood and Broadcasting

By Michele Hilmes. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990. $14.97.

Two recent books investigate the important interface between the film industry and other forms of media. Tino Balio, best known for his two-volume history of United Artists, has assembled here a worthy successor to his excellent anthology, *The American Film Industry*. The new work's 14 essays and two cogent introductory sections by the editor explore the complex, shifting relationships between film and television from the end of World War II to 1990.

One of the welcome aspects of this book is its demolishing of a number of myths that have become sanctified in several introductory cinema texts. For example, the idea that Hollywood behaved like an ostrich, hoping television would fizzle and leave the movie business unaffected, is laid to rest by several authors, especially Timonthy R. White, who traces Paramount's involvement with television back to the 1930s. William Lafferty demonstrates that the decision by the film companies to withhold their feature libraries from television presentation until 1955 was necessitated by opposition from craft unions, guilds, and exhibitors, and, most importantly, from stations that were unwilling to pay what studio executives believed to be a fair price for airing their films—not because the moguls decided to take a noncooperative stance vis-à-vis "the enemy."

All the essays in this volume are thoroughly researched and fully documented, and each contains helpful suggestions for further reading. Among the most enlightening are James L. Baughman's lively account of the development of the American Broadcasting Company in the 1950s; John Belton's comprehensive discussion of wide-screen innovations and the ultimate impact that television presentation would have on the aesthetics of wide-screen film-making; Bruce Austin's insightful overview of the VCR and video rental "revolutions" and their effect on the moviegoing habits of Americans; Laurie Schulze's provocative critique of the injection of controversial issues into the made-for-TV movie; and Edward Buscombe's analysis of the European television market, including a wry assessment of the concerns about potential cultural degradation caused by the intrusion of American programming into the viewing habitats of different European nations.

One of the contributors to *Hollywood in the Age of Television* is Michele Hilmes, whose ambitious *Hollywood and Broadcasting* is constructed upon the assertion that "the film industry played a central role in the evolution of economic structures, program forms, and patterns of distribution in broadcasting, because Hollywood has functioned since the early 1920s as broadcasting's alter ego, its main rival and contributor. . . ." The book's most valuable material is packed into its first 115 pages, which deal with Hollywood and radio. This is nearly unexplored terrain, barely mentioned in the standard texts, and the author fills in the blank space in carefully researched and highly revealing fashion.

The last chapter of the section on film/radio connections offers a fascinating case study of the "Lux Radio Theatre of the Air," utilizing a theoretical model derived from the work of Stuart Hall. This study makes the links between Hollywood and radio in the 1930s and 1940s dramatically explicit, enabling the reader to better understand how radio evolved into "its characteristic, segmented, serial, disrupted discourse of primarily entertainment programs."

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The last chapter of the section on film/radio connections offers a fascinating case study of the "Lux Radio Theatre of the Air," utilizing a theoretical model derived from the work of Stuart Hall. This study makes the links between Hollywood and radio in the 1930s and 1940s dramatically explicit, enabling the reader to better understand how radio evolved into "its characteristic, segmented, serial, disrupted discourse of primarily entertainment programs."

Unfortunately, this is the only case study in a relatively short book (203 pages, plus bibliography and index). This may help to explain why the subsequent sections on the development of television and the rise of pay cable seem more routine, less in-depth. Nonetheless, like the Balio anthology, this is an important scholarly work—one which historians of the media will be consulting and quoting for years to come.

RICHARD B. JEWELL

▪ Richard B. Jewell teaches at the University of Southern California.

Indiscretions
Avant-garde Film, Video and Feminism

By Patricia Mellencamp. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. $12.95.

In her prologue, Pat Mellencamp tells us that she has "left out analyses of many films and videos which I have studied in detail for the simple reason of presumed unfamiliarity as well as the *current fashion of criticism*: metaphorical proclamation about the state of culture, supported by brief wide-ranging citations as documented assertions, rather than detailed, textual explication is the postmodern academic style" (xi, my emphasis). If this seems to you neither an entirely accurate assessment of the state of theory and criticism today, nor a particularly commendable path to follow, then perhaps you will have some difficulty accepting the liberties Mellencamp takes with the formal disciplines of writing history and theory. However, Mellencamp is clear that she wishes to pursue just such a mockery of propriety: she wishes to be indiscreet, which might be taken as a refusal to remain silent about issues of a delicate nature, in this case the sexism and elitism that conditioned avant-garde film practice and criticism prior to the development of feminist theoretical films as a different avant-garde practice in the late seventies.

However, Mellencamp's intentional indiscretion is more far-reaching. She often proceeds in a manner more reminiscent of gossip than of an orderly argument. At times the essays seem to be transcriptions of oral presentations, complete with such colloquialisms as "As I rapped earlier" and parenthetical insertions of personal reminiscences or gossipy descriptions and encapsulations. Knowing that Mellencamp has written on gossip helps place this style as self-conscious and purposeful on her part; she associates this gossiplike approach with a feminist marginality that chooses to comment informally as intermittent interjection, as it mobilizes satire, caricature, and exaggeration as weapons against a history of exclusion from power and discourse.

My sense is that this approach will be quite offensive to some (indeed, from exchanges I have had with others concerned with the avant-garde who have read the book, it is certainly angering and depressing at least some of its readership, and not just the specific males it targets for criticism). One problem of which Mellencamp herself seems amply aware is that her own position may be but a mirror reflection of the male romanticism she is critiquing. Does the antitheoretical, impressionistic style of self-revelation find itself mimicked in Mellencamp's indiscreet commentary unintentionally? If so, Mellencamp might point to her theoretical references and the underlying analytical arguments as presupposing a difference. Yet the question here becomes, Can the style sustain the theory, or does the sliding from the Sublime (as in Lyotard's theory of) to the mundane and even the catty interfere with theoretical understandings? This is not a rhetorical question on my part, for my own response is "Sometimes." For example, I think the theoretical arguments and the historical events here are in such pithy form as to be quite difficult to follow for those not already conversant; gossip whose signifiers are obscure can only be pedagogic in a roundabout and delayed manner, if at all. Is the reader being invited to be the uninitiated guest at a dinner-party conversation? Or is this monologue being aimed primarily at those of us who were there and know, if not the complete cast and main events mentioned here, at least most of them, and some others conspicuously omitted?

Another factor to be considered is that the ploy is inconsistently engaged. At times the book undertakes quite standard essayist argumentation: not only footnotes, but pretenses at being a history as well as being theoretically analytical of that history and of specific films and texts. It is at these moments that its gaps and abrupt assertions, permissible, perhaps, as gestures of style in a "rap," become more questionable as *Indiscretions* assumes the stance of scholarship. So, yes, I wonder, for example, at the complete omission of the writings of so many women (as well as men) on the avant-garde whose theoretical work precedes this volume. As *Indiscretions* slips out of its genre of offhand, overheard remarks and strives to be scholarly, it risks being judged for the sources and aspects of history it omits. Even without applying such academic standards,

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its own rage at the writing of P. Adams Sitney might be ironically echoed through its omission of some of its scholarly precedents: "Women are caught in a logic of contradiction, being slapped in the face and kissed on the cheek at the same time. We are crucial, but absent. Critics and artists, like the film spectator, enact disavowal, pretending that women have not made films or written about these issues" (22–23).

Yet I want to grant this book its verve. If it is a mongrel whose raging howl is precisely an attack on scholarly pedigrees, that allows it to veer between popular culture and the avant-garde in the space of a phrase: "[I]magine *Simulations* as the script for *The Last Judgement* co-starring Yves Montand as Charlton Heston, with Baudrillard in a cameo as a working-class God quoting Cecil B. DeMille" (55). In fact, this quote reminds us that *Indiscretion*'s model seems to be the more recent writing of Jean Baudrillard—impressionistic, full of personality, full of mistakes, some insights. It also, incidentally, reminds me of listening to Stan Brakhage lecture at N.Y.U. in the mid-seventies, asserting that his fantasies of Eisenstein or Murnau could be substituted for film history (see his *Film Biographies*). If one understood those lectures as *autobiographies* of Brakhage, they became more interesting, as a reminder of how much Brakhage borrowed from film-makers he admired. If *Indiscretions* is read in an equally indulgent and particularized manner, we can see it as a reaction to the simultaneous stimuli of art, theory, and feminism, that desires nothing so much as to resolve paradoxes and antagonisms so that feminism and theory can work together for the author and for the reader in the embrace of art and self-expression.

So what are the points Mellencamp wishes to make? First, though this sometimes recedes into the background, that she loves the films of the avant-garde. Not just the feminist theory films, but all those messy, ideologically uncertain or occasionally even offensive barrages of images and sounds. She wishes to couple this appreciation with a recognition of the implicitly theoretical import of these films. This is a worthy point, though one not as original as she maintains, as much scholarship on the contemporary American avant-garde film argues that it has theoretical significance as embodying concepts that range from phenomenology, cognitive theory, psychoanalysis, semiotics, psychoperception, etc. Her specific take on this is to foreground notions of simulacra and surveillance in an ongoing comparison of video and broadcast TV. It is in this context that Mellencamp's appreciation of Owen Land's films, along with those of Robert Nelson and the tapes of The Ant Farm, are intriguing resurrections of works within a current theoretical context. A later move of foregrounding Nam June Paik and Charlotte Mormon in relationship to postmodernism is certainly not surprising—Paik is, after all, the best-known video artist internationally, whose works have always been presented as defining video and indeed postmodernism from the moment that term became current. I do like the juxtaposition of Martha Rosler's *Vital Statistics* to the Paik/Mormon collaboration that comes at the very end of chapter 6, and serves to introduce the discussion of "Uncanny Feminism" in chapter 7 that introduces a worthy discussion of the tapes of Cecelia Condit. From this point on, the book moves to the discussion of the feminist works of Sally Potter and Yvonne Rainer that sees them as successively speaking to women's subjectivity and desire.

What is a bit disconcerting is the return to Jonas Mekas's films in the last chapter, which are brought into conjunction with the theories of Gilles Deleuze. The last chapter tries to unify the book, to resolve the critique of the male avant-garde with the embrace of the feminist avant-garde by joining Mekas to Hollis Frampton and Frampton to Rainer and opposing them all to Stan Brakhage, who remains as Mellencamp's devil. I can see why she makes the move, but it won't work, even with a crucial death marking the absence of any personal objection on Frampton's part. (Actually, Frampton amply objected in print and in person [as has Michael Snow] to being theoretically assimilated as a good guy as opposed to the male subjective of the other guys when he still breathed fire, air, water, and earth.) So where are we? Perhaps theoretically at the place where subjectivities overlap and where romanticism ceases to be seen one-dimensionally as bad, even while we hold on to our feminist and poststructuralist insights.

MAUREEN TURIM

▪ Maureen Turim teaches at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

Magical Reels
A History of Cinema in Latin America

By John King. London: Verso, 1990. $49.95 cloth; $15.95 paper.

The author of this ambitious and comprehensive survey of nearly a century's worth of Latin-American film history is certainly equal to the task. A Latin-American scholar, John King has authored two

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The author of this ambitious and comprehensive survey of nearly a century's worth of Latin-American film history is certainly equal to the task. A Latin-American scholar, John King has authored two

books on Argentine culture and edited *On Latin American Fiction*. And based on the impressive list of people he thanks in the preface—Carlos Monsiváis, Carlos Fuentes, Jorge Sanjines, Gabriel Figueroa, and many others intimately associated with Latin-American film—as well as the literature he cites in the footnotes, he consulted excellent sources in compiling his data.

As King correctly notes in the introduction, his book responds to a crucial need. "There is no study in English," he writes, "that analyses the different currents in Latin American cinema in the twentieth century." Thus his book "attempts to fill the gap by mapping the main contours of the field of investigation." As he lays out his methodological framework, King explains how he will seek to avoid the major pitfalls of such a survey by examining key factors, among them: a) the country-to-country differential in the way the movie industries were instituted and developed; b) "the specific development of the internationalizing forces of global capital in the cultural sphere, in particular the Hollywood film industry"; and c) "the way in which public tastes have been formed for specific genres produced by Hollywood and also by the two major powers in Latin American cinema: Argentina and Mexico." Indeed, the book's greatest strength lies in its economical blending of the extratextual aspects—social, cultural, industrial, historical—with the textual.

For example, before King deals with the new Latin-American cinemas that blossomed in the 1960s and 1970s, he gives a pithy summary of the motivating factors behind the movement. "The enemies," he writes, "were North American imperialism, multinational capital, the seamless diegesis of Hollywood cinema, the fragmentation caused by neo-colonialism. The goals were national and continental liberation." He goes on to list the various problems the movement encountered, then proceeds with his orderly analysis of each country's contribution to New Cinema.

The book, then, is worthwhile, especially for readers new to the fascinating material he covers. Which is not to say that it is without flaws. One shortcoming is inherent to such a study. The broad scope often requires the author to sacrifice substance and nuance for more conspicuous trends, figures, and movements and necessarily precludes almost any lengthy discussion of individual film-makers or films. Thus Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, one of the most important Mexican film-makers of the last 20 years, gets short shrift. He is mentioned as the director of two memorable films, *La pasión según Berenice* (*The Passion According to Berenice*) and *Matinée* (both 1976), but King only has the space to devote a single sentence to each one. Three pages later, King takes up Hermosillo again, this time giving the director and two more of his remarkable films, *Doña Herlinda y su hijo* (*Doña Herlinda and Her Son*, 1984) and *María de mi corazón* (*Maria of My Heart*, 1979), one more paragraph.

The danger of such hurried treatment is that the subject may be trivialized. This is the case with the *Cascabel* (*Rattlesnake*, 1976), a courageous Mexican film that investigates the state's neglect of a tribe of Indians. The film deconstructs not only the supposedly liberal polities of then-President Echeverría but the new wave of leftist film-making—of which *Cascabel* itself was a part. Within the half paragraph that King devotes to it, he (unfairly in my view) dispenses with *Cascabel* by saying, "Despite the earnestness of the intent, the treatment remains conventional and superficial." Worse, he errs in describing the film's climax. King claims that a rattlesnake crawls up the trouser leg of the film's protagonist, when actually the snake crawls into the man's sleeping bag. To compound the error, King then makes an unwarranted comparison of the man's plight with a similar incident in a James Bond movie, awkwardly concluding that "our hero, alas, did not have 007's luck."

There are other errors that mar the book's authenticity. For example, in his discussion of three movie stars of Mexico's Golden Age, Dolores del Río, Maria Félix, and Lupe Vélez, he states that unlike del Rio, who left Hollywood to make films in Mexico, Vélez "never returned to the Mexican film industry." In fact Vélez made two Mexican films after becoming a Hollywood star: *La Zandunga* (1937) and the last film before her tragic suicide, *Nana* (1943), a version of Emile Zola's novel.

Another shortcoming is King's failure to mention the availability of the many films he discusses. While many of them are difficult to view, some have found their way into film and video distribution in this country. Since a handful of the Mexican, Argentine, and Chilean films are available, as are a fair number of the Cuban and Brazilian films, a list would have been helpful.

But the greatest weakness, it seems to me, is King's literary rather than cinematic approach to his subject. When introducing a topic or making a comparison, King typically uses literary examples rather than cinematic ones. Nearly the entire first page of chapter one, for example, is given to a long quote from Gabriel García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which finally leads, on the next page, to the coming of Lumière cameramen to Latin America. Later, King describes Fernando Solana's *Tangos: el exilio de Gardel* (*Tangos: The Exile of Gardel*, 1983), the story of exiled Argentine dancers in Paris. After noting the subtle way the film raises the nagging problem of artists in exile—who do they produce for and why?—he then supports

this with literary evidence. He quotes the Paraguayan novelist Roa Bastos from a book King himself edited.

This penchant for choosing the literary over the cinematic means that the book is lacking in descriptions of *images*—the framing, lighting, mise-en-scène, camera movement, and shot selection that make up the films. This becomes painfully evident when he discusses individual artists and their films. In the introduction, King justly praises Mexican cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa as "one of the most interesting lighting cameramen in the history of cinema." Yet when it comes to the compositional specifics of Figueroa's work, in a later section on Mexican Golden Age film-making, King is disappointingly vague.

Citing Figueroa's collaboration with director Emilio "Indio" Fernández on *Maria Candelaria* (1943), King spends a sentence on Figueroa's contribution. "Figueroa's eloquent photography," he says, "captures . . . the expressive physiognomies of the main characters which harmonize with the expressive nature of the landscape: its lowering clouds, the emblematic plants, the play of light and dark, the shadows cast by the heat of the sun." How is Figueroa's cinematography different from (or similar to) another excellent photographer, Eduard Tissé, who captured Mexican characters on the same landscape for Eisenstein's unfinished *Que Viva Mexico!* Much of what King observed paraphrases a Carlos Monsiváis quote cited four pages earlier on the influence of the American photographer Paul Strand on Figueroa. Strand's cinematography for *Redes* (*Nets*, 1934), writes Monsiváis, "captured . . . fishermen who were . . . harmoniously in tune with nature." Strand's cinematography was the forerunner of the Fernández-Figueroa aesthetic, continues Monsiváis, "with its correspondences between the physiognomy of language and natural landscape." Instead of repeating the idea, why not discuss photographic details such as depth of field, camera angles, and key compositional motifs?

Despite these shortcomings, however, this book serves its purpose as a useful one-volume introduction to Latin-American film-making. As such it is a welcome addition to the growing body of work on a woefully neglected but spellbinding cinema.

CHARLES RAMIREZ BERG

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Metaphor and Film

By Trevor Whittock. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. $39.50.

Had it not been for attempts to prove the existence of God, observed Anthony Collins, no one would have thought to doubt it. This jibe was brought to mind while considering Trevor Whittock's arguments that there are, indeed, metaphors in film. In justifying belief in the deity, enlightenment thinkers had to produce the reasons for doubt in order, then, to allay them; Whittock's procedure is much the same. In *Metaphor and Film*, he proposes to demonstrate that there are better reasons to believe, yet one must wonder just whose doubts are being treated and for what purpose.

Whittock's arguments for the existence of cinematic metaphor occupy the second stage in a four-stage project. Before developing them, he outlines a general theory of metaphor and afterward he constructs a quirky but useful typology of film techniques which typically generate metaphorical meaning. Finally, Whittock supplements the formal focus of the typology with a theory of the imaginative cognitions enabled by metaphor. In this fourth stage Whittock argues that no account of metaphor which restricts its attention to the formal-rhetorical operations of signs will capture metaphor's semantic generativity. This is the most philosophically ramifying of Whittock's discussions, but before commenting on it I want to push my earlier query: to and against whom is Whittock trying to prove the existence of metaphor?

Oddly, *Metaphor and Film* provides little help in discerning the grounds for rationally doubting the existence of the cinematic metaphor that it proposes to rebut. Whittock writes that the doubt is raised by literary theorists fearful of an improper extension of the concept and by film theorists (2). However, the literary-theoretic objection presented, that film trucks in things, not words, and metaphor is possible only in a verbal medium, is only a variant of the film-theoretic objection Whittock considers: since the film image presents either the thing itself or a literal representation of it and not a conventional sign, it fails to possess the detachability of sign and concept required for metaphor. Whittock attributes this position to Kracauer, Arnheim, and Metz. But these attributions must be, I think, wrong. Kracauer, for instance, grounds his preference for realism in putatively unique properties of film, an otiose argument were the figurative impossible. Not even the arch-literalist Bazin, who goes unmentioned, draws the inference Whittock is rejecting.

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Whittock's arguments for the existence of cinematic metaphor occupy the second stage in a four-stage project. Before developing them, he outlines a general theory of metaphor and afterward he constructs a quirky but useful typology of film techniques which typically generate metaphorical meaning. Finally, Whittock supplements the formal focus of the typology with a theory of the imaginative cognitions enabled by metaphor. In this fourth stage Whittock argues that no account of metaphor which restricts its attention to the formal-rhetorical operations of signs will capture metaphor's semantic generativity. This is the most philosophically ramifying of Whittock's discussions, but before commenting on it I want to push my earlier query: to and against whom is Whittock trying to prove the existence of metaphor?

Oddly, *Metaphor and Film* provides little help in discerning the grounds for rationally doubting the existence of the cinematic metaphor that it proposes to rebut. Whittock writes that the doubt is raised by literary theorists fearful of an improper extension of the concept and by film theorists (2). However, the literary-theoretic objection presented, that film trucks in things, not words, and metaphor is possible only in a verbal medium, is only a variant of the film-theoretic objection Whittock considers: since the film image presents either the thing itself or a literal representation of it and not a conventional sign, it fails to possess the detachability of sign and concept required for metaphor. Whittock attributes this position to Kracauer, Arnheim, and Metz. But these attributions must be, I think, wrong. Kracauer, for instance, grounds his preference for realism in putatively unique properties of film, an otiose argument were the figurative impossible. Not even the arch-literalist Bazin, who goes unmentioned, draws the inference Whittock is rejecting.

In short, not even the theorists who defend the

literalism of the image commit the non sequitur of denying that cinematic metaphor is possible. Any "ontological plenitude" possessed by film images would not entail that they are not still representations, means of presenting things, and so of presenting them under an aspect. The plentitude, if it exists, is a property of film images as representations, but it is precisely the fact that film images are representations that would have to be denied to deny the possibility of metaphor. This can be seen more clearly by considering theater or dance, media in which, since the mediating image is apparently altogether absent, plentitude is even more plausible. The conclusion that these media could not be metaphorical is nonetheless unwarranted. The "designative authority" of the film image is no foundation for an anti-metaphor stance (25).

There seems, though, to be a second project in *Metaphor and Film*, a second kind of anti-metaphor stance Whittock wants to overturn which is masked by the one he names. While he intends the scope of his theory to be general, Whittock applies it most often to classical narrative cinema. The point of this application is not to rebut the theorist who holds that metaphor is incompatible with metaphysical literalism but rather to refute the one who would reject a metaphorical reading of *The Quiet Man* (46–47) because taken in by the minimization of "breaks in literal continuity" characteristic of classical cinema (41). Such a theorist, refusing "to attend to the subtleties of cinematic artistry" (48), would apparently hold that realist narrative as such is hostile to metaphor. Arguments to that effect need not draw on ontological commitments and so ontological arguments would, as Whittock's do, miss the mark. Hiding behind the enemy of metaphor explicitly challenged by Whittock is the connoisseur inclined to treat realist cinema as a cemetery for imagination.

The compatibility of realist narrative and metaphor matters profoundly to Whittock because he deems the imagination displayed in and provoked by metaphor to be the essence of artistry. Defending this identification is the purpose of Whittock's supplementation of a rhetorical theory of metaphor with an account of its semantic productivity. Whittock observes that a drawback of a purely rhetorical theory is that it cannot explain why art has metaphors (97–98). To correct this, Whittock urges that we understand metaphors as interactions of mundane categories that create pressure for novel categories. The pressure is responded to by the viewer who grasps the metaphor, allowing the new category to emerge (126–27). Metaphors, in short, invent new meaning by creating the need for it. This process of the mutation of meaning is, for Whittock, as for Coleridge, what art is for.

Now, if Whittock believes that art is essentially metaphorical and that classical cinema is literalistic, i.e., narratively realistic, then he clearly needs to show that literalism and metaphor are compatible in order to show that the classical cinema is artistically significant. Whittock thus tunes his theoretical machinery to redeem classical narrative cinema for art. Metaphor, he argues, possesses a depth not only characteristic of the literal but, further, a depth so much under threat from the literal that Hollywood film-makers had to develop strategies for its unobtrusive introduction (43). These strategies were mandated by the clashing demands of artistry and the mass audience, which required help in keeping the story straight. "Inevitably, figurative levels of meaning were subordinated to narrative thrust" (41). Put this way, Whittock's real aim seems to be to reveal how art takes refuge from the corrosive effects of massification and classical narrative conventions.

Given Whittock's purpose, we can see that he wants to prove that cinematic metaphor is possible to an audience that condemns Hollywood for failing to conform to a traditional conception of the nature of art. And this, I confess, makes me suspicious. One need not disagree with Whittock that cinematic metaphor is possible nor object to his account of metaphoric cognition to feel that locating the artistry of realist narrative in resistances to the literal imports into film studies an inappropriate *identification* of art and metaphoricity. There are surely metaphors at work in Bergman or Brakhage, but the *refusal* of metaphor is also a significant artistic strategy. Indeed, Whittock's attempts to redeem Hollywood film for art block a project which is, from the point of view of a historicized account of art, equally important: the "redemption" of the concept of art for Hollywood film. In writing "In an artistic work everything must fit" (106), Whittock reproduces the kind of organicist aesthetic to which much contemporary art is opposed. Think here of, say, *Kiss Me Deadly* or *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Their hostility to metaphoric recuperation of aesthetic totality is part and parcel of their being art. The attempt to redeem them by reading their metaphors as signs of unobtrusive depth would render Whittock guilty of his own charge of refusing to attend to the subtleties of cinematic artistry.

If Anthony Collins began to doubt the existence of God only when it was proved to him, the philosophers did him a service. *Metaphor and Film* performs a similar service. It cannot lead to doubt that cinematic metaphor is possible, for that is eminently unreasonable. But it does lead to doubt that we need the concept to grasp the operations of Hollywood narrative cinema under threat of missing its artistry. A certain conception

of the essence of art has ceased, perhaps, to be functional, and this is in part due to the narrative form of some films. As we heed Whittock's well-taught lessons, so, too, should we heed the films themselves.

GREGG HOROWITZ

▪ Gregg Horowitz writes on philosophy and the arts; he is guest faculty at Wesleyan University.

The Missing Reel

The Untold Story of the Lost Inventor of Motion Pictures

By Christopher Rawlence. New York: Atheneum, 1990. $19.95.

In 1888, French-born Louis Aimé Augustin Le Prince was awarded an American patent for a primitive, 16-lens motion-picture camera able to record motion from a single viewing position. During the next two years, experimenting in a workshop provided by his father-in-law in Leeds, England, he perfected a single-lens camera and produced several film sequences, now in the archives of the Science Museum in London. In 1890 he mysteriously disappeared. With his family awaiting his return to New York, he visited a brother in France, then reportedly boarded a train for Paris and was never seen or heard from again.

In 1930, members of the Royal Photographic Society and the Society of Motion Picture Engineers held ceremonies commemorating Le Prince's achievements and affixed a plaque to the building in Leeds where he had worked. The plaque was still there in 1976 when Christopher Rawlence, a young British television writer/producer, bought the building with a group of friends only to learn that it was to be razed for urban renewal. Hoping that publicity would save the building, Rawlence decided on a TV film about Le Prince—and here was born the idea, too, for *The Missing Reel.*

After six years Rawlence managed to track down a great-grandson, William Le Prince Heuttel, who provided the "main sources" for this biography—the unpublished memoirs of Le Prince's son Adolphe and his widow, Elizabeth ("Lizzie") Le Prince, who remained convinced her husband had been kidnapped or murdered by persons close to Thomas Edison, with some of whom Le Prince had been acquainted.

In essentially giving us Lizzie's story, Rawlence perpetuates this unlikely scenario and accords undue attention to Edison the man, and to the celebrated turn-of-the-century motion picture patent litigation. Rawlence has also chosen historical fiction as his format, inventing scenes, thoughts, even dialogue. But he is no Hercule Poirot: he has rooted out little that was not placed on the record at the 1930 Leeds tribute. An undocumented reference to French film historian Georges Potonniée's conclusion that Le Prince had been in debt and probably committed suicide is the bombshell left to the book's end. WILLIAM WELLING

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nevertheless qualifies it as a major resource alongside Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet*. While Russo primarily scrutinized gay and lesbian representation in Hollywood cinema from a critical perspective of gay viewership, Dyer necessarily confronts the problematic subjects of authorship and identity by concentrating on "films made, to some significant degree, by people who considered themselves to be, in whatever parlance of their day, lesbian or gay and which openly embrace gay/lesbian subject matter."

As the reader of *Now You See It* detects a history of suppression of gay/lesbian films, Dyer's archaeological and meta-attributive project gains in both relevancy and urgency. The fragmentary status of *Anders als die Andern (Different from the Others)* following Nazi destruction of Magnus Hirschfeld's archives; the excision of indicative lesbian scenes for U.S. distribution of *Mädchen in Uniform (Girls in Uniform)*; the multiform, multinational, multidecade censorship of Jean Genet's *Un Chant d'amour (A Song of Love)*; the confiscation of Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* by San Francisco police; the seizures and trials of Anger's *Scorpio Rising* in Los Angeles and Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* in New York (let alone the more recent exploitative homophobic attack by Pat Buchanan on Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied*) reveal the frangibility of films with gay/lesbian subject matter. Regardless of one's position in the essentialist/constructionist debate, it is difficult not to take personally such an enduring threat of discursive extinction. Hence the importance of Dyer's revisionary reclaiming of "identity"—as socially constructed but privately realized, always impure, lesbian and gay identities. He approaches this task by delving into context and intertextuality.

Now You See It consists of five nearly autonomous chapters. Briefly: Chapter 1, "Weimar: less or more like the others," analyzes *Anders als die Andern* and *Mädchen in Uniform* in relation to Weimar Germany. Dyer establishes how the convergence of contradictory modes in *Anders*—the "social problem" genre of Aufklärungsfilm (Enlightenment films) and Hirschfeld's pro-"third sex" lecture—creates an ambivalent presentation of homosexuality. Conversely, in *Mädchen*, schoolgirl Manuela's flaunting of "third sex" fashion when declaring her love for Fräulein von Bernburg coexists comfortably with the film's otherwise female-identified lesbian semiotics of feminine casting and lighting. Chapter 2, "Shades of Genet," envelopes *Un Chant d'amour* in a discussion of Genet's conflation of art and porn discourses; French gay artistic culture; the linkage of homosexuality with criminality by *poètes maudits*; Jean Cocteau's influence on Genet, particularly in relation to an aesthetics of artifice and narcissism; and a continuing Genet-esque affectation in films such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Querelle* (adapted from Genet's novel) and Elfi Mikesch and Monika Treut's *Verführung (Seduction: the Cruel Woman)*. Chapter 3, "Underground and after," discusses 40s West Coast and 60s East Coast U.S. avant-garde films in relation to their art/gay nexuses. Kenneth Anger's films are read in terms of Magik and 40s gay male porn, Gregory Markopoulos's with reference to Greek mythology and gay French literature, James Broughton's in relation to Beat spiritual sexuality, Jack Smith's and Andy Warhol's 60s films in terms of camp, pop art, and mass culture. Although Dyer sees the 50s as a hiatus in gay film-making, he figures the decade within the American sexual cauldron—the publication of *Playboy* and the Kinsey reports, the establishment of the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis, Off Off Broadway, popular Freudianism, and novels of urban alienation figuring the hustler and queen. Across this (extrafilmic) bridge Dyer locates stylistic shifts in gay film-making that parallel changing attitudes toward the self—from a 40s search for authenticity to a 60s display of artifice, from the sad young man to the flamboyant persona. Chapter 4, "Lesbian woman: lesbian cultural feminist film," describes women's underworld film-making in the 70s with attention to the lesbian-feminist politics and aesthetics of woman identification. Such films as Carol Clement's *Luna Tune*, Anne Severson's *Near the Big Chakra*, and numerous works by Barbara Hammer pose content and iconography drawn from women's history, matriarchal mythology, nature, autobiography, and the female body in concert with a formal celebration of cycles, tactility, merging, and collectivity. Chapter 5, "From and for the movement," categorizes a group of films produced within the gay/lesbian liberation movement in relation to institutional, confrontational, and affirmation politics. Dyer's largest category, the form of affirmation politics, includes both documentaries (such as Mariposa Film Group's *Word Is Out* and Elizabeth Stevens, Cathy Zheutlin, and Frances Reid's *In the Best Interests of Children*) and fiction film (such as Richard Benner's *Outrageous* and Donna Gray's *After the Game*). Dyer's critique of these films' engagement with identity, particularly with respect to consciousness raising, coming out, activism, and positive images, is both appreciative and incisive.

All of the above chapters left me wanting even more from Dyer. "Underground and after" especially would benefit from greater length. The cogency of the book, however, exceeds its individual chapters. For example, one impression that advances through the book is the representational relationship between female bonding and lesbianism. From the soft and innocent femininity in *Mädchen in Uniform* to the woman power

in Hammer's *Double Strength*, a mutuality of woman and lesbian, suggestive of Adrienne Rich's continuum, ironically makes lesbians both less discernible and more recognizable. The operative extent of this convention is demonstrated when Dyer opens "Lesbian woman" with Maya Deren's *At Land*—by virtue of its female sensual bonding and despite its not being "really" lesbian. Moreover, Dyer also perceives a much-overlooked link between the explicit sexual imagery of many cultural feminist films and today's trailblazing lesbian porn—Honey Lee Cotrell meets Pat Califia, *Sweet Dreams*.

From headmistress to hearthrob, outlaw to activist, Dyer's *Now You See It* proffers lesbian/gay identity as a ceaselessly authored concept proliferating via resistance, pliancy, and ingenuity. Therefore, it remains politic to both deconstruct and relish the slippage between text and actuality. These identities neither represent all lesbians and gays, nor have all lesbians and gays had the opportunity to contribute to the parlance. Notwithstanding the gratitude and respect due to the subjective harbingers and nonmainstream witnesses of gay/lesbian film, it is important to recognize that issues of economics and race seriously impact on access to instrument and audience even in independent film-making.

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Pier Paolo Pasolini
Cinema as Heresy

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Naomi Greene's book on Pasolini continues the welcome trend in American film studies away from the cultural insularity that has marked it in the past. She has apparently mastered all the relevant material in Italian and French, and it is meant as no denigration of her often illuminating analyses of Pasolini's theory and practice to say that her book will be especially useful to American critics for its large number of quotations from the director's many untranslated interviews and from inaccessible Italian and French film and literary sources.

Pasolini has usually been regarded in this country as one of the makers of the international "art films" that flourished in the sixties in the wake of Godard and as a theoretician who was hugely, and embarrassingly, wrong. Only recently have we begun to acquire the tools necessary for a proper understanding of Pasolini's films and of that even more recalcitrant area, his theory. We can now see his lifelong split between "passion" and "ideology"—the aesthetic, the pagan, the hermetic, the excessive, the irrational on the one hand, and the realistic, the political, the accessible, the rational on the other—as more than just idiosyncratic to him, but as a kind of founding division of contemporary thought.

Pasolini's film practice is itself enormously complicated and, as Greene would probably be the first to admit, her analyses are far from comprehensive. Films like *Teorema* (1968) and *Porcile* (1969)—let alone the quasi-pornographic "trilogy of life" *(The Decameron, The Canterbury Tales,* and *A Thousand and One Nights)* and his grotesque masterpiece, *Salò* (1975)—have been rarely seen here and even more rarely understood. For one thing, it is difficult to make sense of Pasolini's films, especially one like the brilliant political fable *Hawks and Sparrows* (1966), for example, without understanding the political context in which they were made. American readers will thus appreciate Greene's sure-handed guidance through the breathtaking permutations of Pasolini's politics in the labyrinth of postwar Italian culture wars. Besides the political context, Greene also reads the films in their autobiographical and (often French) literary contexts as well, and her approach, which for better or worse is largely formalist, has the virtue of being able to demonstrate how much in Pasolini's films is continually thematized through form.

There is no doubt in my mind that Pasolini is one of the most brilliant, aggressively innovative filmmakers of the postwar period, and his films need to become more easily available for appreciation and for study. But a more immediate and perhaps even more important reason to resuscitate Pasolini lies in his potential contribution to film theory.

When Pasolini first intervened in the late sixties in the nascent field of film semiotics, he was derided for his "cinema of poetry," which seemed, to theoreticians like Umberto Eco and Christian Metz, to be the very antithesis of the scientificity to which they aspired. Even worse, his insistence that he used something called "reality" to signify reality seemed to be little more than a reversion to a precritical sense of nature as something given directly to perception and understanding without passing first through the codes of culture.

It was only during the eighties, more than five years after Pasolini's brutal murder at the hands of a homosexual prostitute, that theorists such as Teresa de Lauretis in this country and Gilles Deleuze in France (in his strangely neglected, brilliant books on film) began to

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suggest that we had gotten Pasolini all wrong. The publication by Indiana University Press of a translation of Pasolini's central book on film and literary theory, *Empirical Hereticism*, has been another important milestone. We can now understand that in these early writings he was beginning to articulate an idea of subjectivity that Metz was to come to independently, later, by the somehow more acceptable path of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Pasolini also exalted the irrational and the excessive in both his writings and in his films in ways that have become commonplace since the advent of poststructuralism. The frenzied, Adorno-like attacks on the mass media and popular culture that occupied the last part of his life, and his concomitant abandonment of Gramsci's privileged space of the authentically "national-popular" may make his theoretical work less attractive to contemporary cultural critics, but his ideas in this area still need to be worked through. Greene rightly devotes one entire chapter (out of seven) to Pasolini's theoretical writings, and is especially good on the Deleuze-Pasolini connection.

Somewhat troublesome is the fact that the level of Greene's discourse does not always match that of the Italian and French critics she amply quotes from, nor Pasolini's own discussions of his intentions for each film. Often these quotations will point to theoretical complexities regarding, say, textuality or subjectivity and spectator positioning that Greene's more traditionally formalist language cannot accommodate. Occasionally Greene seems overwhelmed by the theoretical density of some critic and chooses to let a gnomic quotation stand on its own as the final word, without further elaboration or criticial intervention. In all fairness, the reason for this disinclination to engage seems more often than not to be a lack of space to make the necessary distinctions rather than a lack of theoretical understanding. In any case, her passionate and complex discussion of *Salò* at the end of the book goes a long way toward making up for her tentativeness elsewhere. Like many Italian critics, she often falls prey to the temptation to see Pasolini's homosexuality as the master concept that explains everything in his life and work, but she has convinced me that the overarching emphasis on this aspect of Pasolini's life is perhaps not entirely misplaced.

At times the book suffers from its inevitable condensation: the ten or fifteen feature-length films Pasolini made are textually dense and self-contradictory and require, ultimately, a level of exegesis that Greene cannot give them here. Nevertheless, this is the first really sophisticated, even remotely comprehensive book on the director to appear in English, and Greene cannot be faulted for not trying to do, or say, everything at once.

Ultimately, however, we will need something on Pasolini altogether more radical in terms of content—and perhaps more radical in formal terms as well—to match the proto-postmodern radicality of the director's contribution to cinema practice and theory. Until that other book comes along, however, Greene's study admirably fills a crucial gap in our understanding of one of the richest and most fatally transgressive filmmakers and film theorists of our time.

PETER BRUNETTE

▪ Peter Brunette is the author of *Roberto Rossellini* (Oxford, 1987) and co-author (with David Wills) of *Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory* (Princeton, 1989).

Points of Resistance

Women, Power, and Politics in the New York Avant-Garde Cinema, 1943-71

By Lauren Rabinovitz. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991. $34.95 cloth; $14.95 paper.

Lauren Rabinovitz's *Points of Resistance* sets out to reclaim a dimension of women's contributions to the history of avant-garde cinema by recognizing the accomplishments of Maya Deren, Shirley Clarke, and Joyce Wieland in the areas of film-making, film exhibition and distribution, and political action. This is a noble undertaking. Recognition for these, and for so many other women (and men) who have made substantial contributions to the avant-garde scene over the years, is long overdue. Deren, Clarke, and Wieland were productive, inventive film-makers during periods when women's contributions to culture were marginalized, and, as Rabinovitz suggests, this marginalization can be read in the films they produced. Further, the historical overlap and interchange between Deren and Clarke, and between Clarke and Wieland can be understood as a feminist continuity that predates the more recent waves of feminist collaboration. *Points of Resistance* is strongest in its review of writings about avant-garde film since World War II.

For Rabinovitz, the central issue in avant-garde cinema is "canonization," especially as exemplified in the early 1970s, when Jonas Mekas, P. Adams Sitney, James Broughton, Ken Kelman, and Peter Kubelka defined the "essential cinema" for Anthology Film

suggest that we had gotten Pasolini all wrong. The publication by Indiana University Press of a translation of Pasolini's central book on film and literary theory, *Empirical Hereticism*, has been another important milestone. We can now understand that in these early writings he was beginning to articulate an idea of subjectivity that Metz was to come to independently, later, by the somehow more acceptable path of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Pasolini also exalted the irrational and the excessive in both his writings and in his films in ways that have become commonplace since the advent of poststructuralism. The frenzied, Adorno-like attacks on the mass media and popular culture that occupied the last part of his life, and his concomitant abandonment of Gramsci's privileged space of the authentically "national-popular" may make his theoretical work less attractive to contemporary cultural critics, but his ideas in this area still need to be worked through. Greene rightly devotes one entire chapter (out of seven) to Pasolini's theoretical writings, and is especially good on the Deleuze-Pasolini connection.

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Archives, and—at least as it's often understood these days—attempted to solidify positions of aesthetic power for themselves by canonizing a set of works mostly by male artists. Rabinovitz is at pains to disassociate herself from the Anthology group and from the more general "notion of authorship as one of 'pure' creativity." She wants to avoid "the Modern critical project of excavating themes and concepts" in works of art "whose meaning is already constituted and predetermined by a godlike creator." The critic's task is to find "how *meanings* are constructed among different groups and at different moments."

This may be *one* of the critic's tasks, but it is not the only one. We cannot have a sense of what we (and our students) might profit from most if no one takes the chance of defining what films we "should" see. Life is short, our time for seeing film limited. Choices must be made, or at least suggested. The Anthology group announced their selections, committed themselves to the maintenance of particular films, and challenged others to demonstrate why other films are more worthy of attention. A good many people accepted the challenge, and our sense of film history has grown as a result.

Rabinovitz places herself in a difficult position. She wants the accomplishments of Deren, Clarke, and Wieland recognized without being accused of canonizing them. She avoids being a conventional canonizer by justifiably honoring the work these women did other than make their own films. Deren worked tirelessly not only to see that her own films were seen and appreciated but to bring recognition to the entire field of alternative film-making. Clarke was a key figure in the New York film scene in the 1950s, one of the founders of Filmmakers Inc. and the Filmmakers Distribution Center. In the 1970s, Wieland became a key figure in Canadian Artists' Representation, a national artists' union, and a champion of Canadian art making. *Points of Resistance* provides useful descriptions of these activities.

Nevertheless, Rabinovitz's decision to focus her book on *these* three film-makers reconfirms the traditional canon she is so suspicious of. My guess is that regardless of her disparaging of the "notion of authorship as one of 'pure' creativity," Rabinovitz chooses to center her book on Deren, Clarke, and Wieland because she knows that some of their films make a reasonably compelling case for their authors' recognition. Their non-film-making activities are of interest to Rabinovitz because of their accomplishments as film-makers and their commitment to film-making as a creative activity.

But here's the rub: Rabinovitz's fear of being a canonizer keeps her from committing to in-depth readings of particular films. After all, since the meanings of films are a function of the sociopolitical circumstances within which the films are made, and since all films can be read in many ways, why bother? The problem, of course, is that we cannot know what *any* individual or group *does* understand about a particular film-maker and film—that is, "how *meanings* are constructed"—if those individuals/groups refuse to attempt detailed, coherent readings of particular works on the grounds that other readings are possible. Rabinovitz's readings of the Deren films are generally cursory, little more than summaries, and even *Meshes of the Afternoon* receives relatively short shrift. A more compelling case is made for Clarke's innovative self-reflexivity in her early cinema-verité films and for Wieland's *The Far Shore*, but most of the Clarke and Wieland films are not explored in detail. *Points of Resistance* may add to what is generally known about the milieu in which Deren, Clarke, and Wieland worked, but it doesn't substantially reenergize thinking about the film-makers and their films.

Points of Resistance is also weakened by its failure to rise above its academic origins. Like much academic writing, its attempt to be precise often ends in obfuscation. For example, the subsection "The Term *Avant-garde* in Culture," where Rabinovitz attempts to come to grips with the many meanings "avant-garde" has had, concludes, "The term *avant-garde cinema* will hereafter refer to historically specific moments in which individuals, groups, and institutions produced and were produced by a system of artistic meaning from interrelationships among political, aesthetic, and economic practices." Nearly any term could be substituted for "avant-garde cinema" in this "definition."

A final note: like so many books and articles on film, *Points of Resistance* participates in a most annoying academic tradition: the privileging of written texts about films over the filmic texts themselves. Every reference to every article is footnoted with great care, and the volume concludes with a useful 13-page bibliography of relevant books and articles. But the films? They're listed on a single page, year by year, titles only, with no information about where they can be rented or, in those instances where films are not available for rental, about where to locate them. The irony is that scholarly writings could not exist without their authors' exploitation of the labor, the risky financial investments, and the creativity of the film-makers.

SCOTT MACDONALD

▪ Scott MacDonald teaches at Utica College.

Reality Fictions
The Films of Frederick Wiseman

By Thomas W. Benson and Carolyn Anderson. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989. $45.00.

Within academic circles Frederick Wiseman has emerged as the foremost American documentary film-maker of the post-1960, cinema-verité era. His impressive and still continuing output of films, his ability to create and sustain an authorial voice, his concerns with relations of power and authority, his consistently ironic skepticism, his subversion—if not complete rejection—of narrative, his underlying radical-liberal politics all help to account for this appeal. Anderson and Benson's book, a rigorous and extended examination of nine Wiseman films, is a badly needed addition to the literature on documentary in general and Wiseman in particular.

The authors offer close textual analyses as a means to explore larger issues such as documentary ethics, the continued call for objectivity, and the ways a film operates to construct meanings and spectator response. As I proceeded through *Reality Fictions*, however, my respect for Anderson and Benson's achievements was balanced by reservations. My first frustration was with their use of terminology. The authors caricature and quickly dismiss the terms "cinema verité" and "direct cinema," arguing that Wiseman is doing something fundamentally different—something the film-maker once called "reality fictions." Yet, as they point out, Wiseman soon described his own turn of phrase as a pompous parody and abandoned it. It is a term that the authors adopt—even in the very title of their book—and take too seriously, applying it and the term "fictional" to all subjective renderings and reorganization of actuality materials. Nonfiction and fiction film are all fictional— a collapse of categories that Noël Carroll, for one, has effectively argued against."[1] What we would normally call "fiction films" they then feel compelled to call "conventional narrative" films, even though most documentaries would seem to have narratives as conventional as the average Hollywood product. This grappling with terminology forces the writers into unnecessary convolutions and the development of their own sometimes private and idiosyncratic vocabulary.

The problem of terminology is matched by a failure to situate Wiseman's work and achievements within the history of documentary film practice. Wiseman works in, and has significantly extended, the American cinema-verité tradition of observational documentary film-making. His work needs to be understood within this framework, as part of its trajectory. And this absence of context is also evident in one other area. Though providing a wide range of references and citations to works of literature and literary theory, Anderson and Benson do not consider Wiseman in relationship to related contemporaneous discourse, notably the writings of Michel Foucault. Truly this appears unfortunate, for the two have so much in common—especially their intersecting concerns with power, authority, institutions, and discourse. More generally, Anderson and Benson never adequately explore the ways in which Wiseman's early films played into certain easy critiques of the institutions he filmed. Wiseman's films need to be placed within the debates about American society and its institutions if the issue of documentary ethics is to be fully considered.

Benson and Anderson conclude their book by suggesting: "To make full use of Wiseman's films as social documentaries would mean, it seems to us, an answering series of documentaries that finds a way to use Wiseman's penetrating vision while restoring history and politics to that vision." Much the same could be said about the authors' own substantial achievements.

CHARLES MUSSER

▪ Charles Musser teaches film studies at UCLA. His book *The Emergence of Cinema* recently won the Jay Leyda Prize in Cinema Studies.

1. Noël Carroll, "From Real to Reel: Entangled in Nonfiction Film," *Philosophic Exchange* 14 (1983), pp. 5-45.

The Screening of America
Movies and Values from *Rocky* to *Rain Man*

By Tom O'Brien. New York: Continuum, 1990. $21.95.

O'Brien attempts to create a space for himself that exists somewhere between scholarly film studies and popular movie books, a space he believes can be articulated with serious discussion, moral concern, and an understanding that film and culture are inextricable. A space, indeed, for thought and meditation on what contemporary cinema is about.

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Perhaps there is a need for such a space. And if O'Brien had written a book that examined some recent ideas about film, ideology, and culture, considered the work of Robin Wood, Ryan and Kellner, Dana Polan, Michael Rogin, for example, he might have come up with a useful popularization. But, alas, he wants to treat major concerns in an unscholarly and finally unserious way. He does indeed consider the big themes and major motifs of eighties cinema—home, gender, patriotism, sports, religion, education, environment—and does attempt to untangle some complicated contextual strands. But O'Brien's sense of simplification remains that of the reviewer (which he is, for *Commonweal*); he engages in no major discussion of form and structure and does not examine the knotty areas of form and reception. There is only the most superficial treatment of conventions and codes, and nothing on cultural practice.

Instead—deciding at the outset that the fact that "any art form both reflects and shapes the culture around it" is simply "common sense"—he does a kind of fast-and-loose content analysis and trend spotting. Claiming to stand in the center, looking to uphold traditional religious, educational, and domestic values, and to draw favorable attention to films that steer clear of any major deviation to the right or left, he looks for themes and backs off whenever he comes to anything requiring serious probing. He discovers, for example, that at the core of Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ* is a desire for the comforts of the domestic life, "an unconscious, partly conservative tribute to the power of home in the 1980s." He knows a conservative movement when he sees one, but won't go very far to meditate on how such movements are articulated and what it means for a revisionist religious film suddenly to veer into the very ideology that reviles its existence. He is aware that there is irony lurking, but does not think out all the ramifications.

For O'Brien, irony—"the intellectual black hole of our age" that has its "high priests" among the "literary intelligentsia" and its "acolytes" among "lit and flick graduate students"—is only a way of debunking; and this, for someone who wishes so badly to believe, is a great sin.

Beyond his aversion to complexity, O'Brien's problem is that he consistently undermines his own best instincts—not only with an anti-intellectualism that is as destructive as it is banal, or a writing style the chumminess and vulgarity of which undercuts any hope of serious discourse, but with a refusal to negotiate with his own sense of propriety. By "reviewing" instead of looking closely, by evading insight (the book is not without insights!) with a foolish turn of phrase, he manages in almost every instance to skitter past his intriguing belief—even faith—that film can indeed speak to us on a moral level. ROBERT P. KOLKER

▪ Robert P. Kolker teaches at the University of Maryland at College Park.

Screen/Play
Derrida and Film Theory

By Peter Brunette and David Wills. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989. $37.50 cloth; $13.95 paper.

According to Brunette and Wills, "before the appearance of a book like Gregor Ulmer's *Applied Grammatology*, writing on Derrida seemed mostly to remain within a descriptive mode that failed to engage his ideas in such a way as to continue and expand their program, in spite of the fact that his writing often calls for just that" (99). *Screen/Play* strikes an excellent balance between information and application, between bringing the reader up to date with Derrida's less-known work (from *Glas* onward) and expanding the program of his ideas in the field of film studies, which thus far, with very few exceptions, has ignored his work and privileged that of Lacan.

In a thoughtful and well-informed (the whole book reveals an impressive scholarship) introductory chapter, Brunette and Wills give a useful overview of the main concepts underwriting the French philosopher's project, situate deconstruction in relation to other approaches, and take pains to defend Derrida from the accusations of being apolitical. Arguing that "currently too many leftists seem to combat the absolute presences of oppressive systems with other absolute presences that are really only their symmetrical opposites" (31), the authors suggest that the political value of deconstruction lies "in its very pertinent insistence on interrogating the grounding of its own discourse and that of the institution in general" (25).

The second chapter is a must for any film student or teacher in that it shows the perspective broached by a deconstructive approach. As Brunette and Wills ruthlessly expose the assumptions regulating such notions as film history, genre, and spectator-as-unified-subject, the challenge of finding new forms of conceptualizing our material is cast—we're still in time, our discipline is less encrusted with a long tradition than, say, literature or art history.

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As it tackles the issue of cinema's relationship to reality, the third chapter covers a more familiar ground, for the attack against "naïve" realism has been on the agenda of film studies for some time now. What is new, here, is not so much the notion that cinema ought to be considered like "writing" (instead of "speech")—a material inscription that rewrites the profilmic rather than copying it—but, rather, the suggestion that reality itself is "writing," always-already a semiotic negotiation between a perceiving subject and an object. Seen in this light, "the relation between reality and, say, a documentary on it, would be displaced and redefined such that the two terms came to be seen as mutually constituting each other. The relation between them would be an intertextual one" (75). Of course, such an approach entails a radical revision of what we normally conceive as text. Implicitly taking issue with the conventional desire to see the text as a cohesive whole, Brunette and Wills convincingly argue that "the text is *fundamentally* incoherent" so that "analysis would no longer seek the supposed center of meaning, but instead turn its attention to the margins, where the supports of meaning are disclosed" (62, emphasis retained).

Entitled "The Frame of the Frame," the fourth chapter further substantiates the authors' idea of the fundamental incoherence of the text by showing that it is actually impossible to uphold the inside/outside dichotomy when talking about the film frame. As everything in the text opens up to an unlimited context and the unity of the image itself is nothing but a convention, traditional forms of writing about cinema are likely to perpetuate ancient paradigms. "Taking the lead from Derrida's writing on photography, however, we might begin to imagine a type of writing on film whose rhetoric borrows something from the technology of the medium; a rhetoric of cinema (perhaps later of the video clip) informed by angle shots, double takes, shifts of focus, and close-ups" (137). An intriguing program indeed!

In the fifth chapter, Brunette and Wills "unmask this fiction of unity" (139) engendered by the joint writing and engage, separately, in the reading of two films, Truffaut's *The Bride Wore Black* (1967) and Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986). Whereas I found the reading of the former stimulating, I had problems with the latter, problems which, in a sense, epitomize what my only criticism of *Screen/Play* would be: its difficulty. The piece on *Blue Velvet* is particularly hard to follow and I kept wondering what my reward was going to be. Differently put, a difficult text ought to provide its readers with a feeling that their effort will somehow pay off, that something will be gained from the energy spent in trying to understand. I am not sure that it is entirely possible to be Derridean and avoid using an elitist jargon, but, in a way, the reading of Truffaut's film in *Screen/Play* is there to demonstrate that one can, at least, limit the disastrous effects of a difficult textuality. It is because I find the issues raised by this book extremely important, indeed essential, for anybody who cares about the studying and the teaching of film, that I am worried about the automatic self-ghettoization that, *realistically speaking*, this kind of language is going to bring about. An example to keep in mind is Pasolini, who often made points similar to Derrida (reality = cinema = writing) and yet did not give in to the desire for difficult language.

In the last chapter, Brunette and Wills use Derrida's *The Post Card* to demonstrate how film criticism is still operating in accordance with the rules of "the postal," a convenient metaphor for a "model of communication that assumes systems of address based on identity" (185)—a model of communication kept in place by Plato's overarching shadow. Once again, the authors disclose the fascinating potential opened up by an approach that does not strive to reinsert audiovisual information into old patterns of reading but accepts the challenge posited by the radical novelty of certain technological "events" such as video, computerized images, and virtual reality.

Accepting the challenge: this is, in my opinion, the best way to describe the effect of reading *Screen/Play*. It is a book that makes you feel that you can no longer go about your business as usual, for there are fundamental questions that you cannot avoid lest you lose your credibility. In this respect, Brunette and Wills' book is profoundly political, and it does not help much to dismiss it from the left, as Mas'ud Zavarzadeh has recently done in *Seeing Films Politically*, where he treats *Screen/Play* as the ultimate example of a conservative postmodernism. While understanding how certain difficult and abstract pun-games may have caused this judgment, I think Zavarzadeh misses the *political* point of Brunette and Wills' project. One has to accept the challenge posited by Derrida and do as Gramsci suggested, that is, to realize where the strength of his ideas lies and incorporate it. Then, and only then, instead of "continuing and expanding their program," we may try to hijack his ideas, politically.

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Seeing Films Politically

By Mas'ud Zavarzadeh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. $49.50 cloth; $16.95 paper.

This is an important and challenging book, one which throws down the gauntlet with a vengeance. Zavarzadeh's argument against postmodern film theory proceeds deftly and shrewdly. At first, it disarmingly takes postmodern film theory at its word, as having convincingly pinpointed a central ideological drawback of more traditional film theory. Suppose you freely grant postmodern film theory one of its crucial remonstrances against the "realist" text of the classical Hollywood film, which is that this text reproduces the position of "knowing" that constitutes the subject (the "character" in the narrative on the screen or the spectator in the cinema). Suppose that you then go on freely to admit the validity of another postmodernist claim: that the avant-garde film text effectively contests the unitary subject of the "realist" film text by presenting the subject as unstable, changeable, and contradictory. You will then have arrived at a contrast, between "realism" as an attempt to construct reactionary subjects, fixed and confined in their unitary identities, on the one hand, and, on the other, the avant-garde, which by contrast portrays or creates radical subjects who are decentered, labile, and open to change. Suppose that you accept this contrast for what it's worth, but question what in fact it *is* worth. In Zavarzadeh's opinion it isn't worth very much at all, partly because what he calls (by now, rather optimistically) "late capitalism" requires mobile, adaptable subjects as well as fixed, centered ones.

But this more or less familiar claim is only part of the argument of *Seeing Films Politically*—perhaps fortunately so, since Marx's argument about the division of labor in early capitalism made much the same point. Zavarzadeh's argument, to its everlasting credit, goes further and deeper than this. Believing traditionalists and postmodernists to be supposedly bitter enemies who in reality have much more in common than members of either school would be comfortable believing, and that their apparently incompatible positions are in fact profoundly complementary, Zavarzadeh almost gleefully tars them with the brush of complicity and collusion. He admits that what "traditional film criticism regards as 'natural' turns out to be an effect of 'language' in ludic postmodern theory," but then proceeds to ask what changes this supposedly cataclysmic transformation has really brought about. Postmodern theory "simply replaces one ahistorical world (of commonsense, natural meanings) with another (of textualized meanings held in language)." Knowledge in each case is held to reside either in the natural world, which discloses its secrets to us as subjects, or in the formal structures of language or textuality, which disclose their secrets to us in a manner that is not at all fundamentally dissimilar. Either way, as Zavarzadeh goes on to indicate, knowledge is regarded as being immanent in the object of knowledge; both traditional and postmodernist approaches end up by equating knowledge with experience of the object of knowledege. All that has changed is the location of this object. The idea of what counts as knowledge has remained exactly the same.

In traditional approaches, there is no "slippage" between the consciousness of the experiencing subject and the act of experiencing. These exist, as it were, on the same seamless continuum, and their placement on it makes possible the claim that experience is a reliable representation of the real. Postmodern film criticism simply replaces one kind of empiricism, that of the senses and prediscursive reality, with another, that of discourse and textuality. What film now signifies is what goes into its own discourses. But what has not changed one whit is the manner of signification itself. The visible can take the form either of the world "out there," which admits of our registration or representation of it, or of the immanent properties of film itself —which happen to admit of registration or representation of a very similar kind. What traditionalism and postmodernism, these two seemingly discordant approaches, share is very fundamental indeed: a theory of knowledge that couples the world to knowledge about/experience of the world, a theory that tells us that *something* "out there" is real, accessible to our senses and capable of being directly apprehended, without mediation.

If Zavarzadeh is right, postmodernist strictures against traditional film theory are, at a basic philosophical level, instances of the pot calling the kettle black, and yet another ill thought-out wheel has finally come full circle. Things being as they are, however, I strongly doubt whether we have heard the last word on this issue. But Zavarzadeh is surely right in issuing his challenge: it simply won't do on the one hand to dispute the possibility of direct, unmediated experience in or of a film, and on the other to reintroduce and even to require this same possibility at another level. What gets bracketed, wherever you insert it, are the socioeconomic, political, and ideological conditions of spectatorship. The "political economy of spectatorship," as Zavarzadeh calls it, is a concept worthy of more detailed elaboration than it receives in *Seeing Films Politically*, and so, for that matter, is the concept of "renarration," a strategy of resistance that the book

proffers rather than characterizes. Even so, *Seeing Films Politically* is a book that is every bit as provocative as its author intended it to be; any critical comment on my part is intended as an invitation to Zavarzadeh to write more in the same vein. This reader, at least, would welcome anything else he'd have to say.

PAUL THOMAS

▪ Paul Thomas teaches at the University of California at Berkeley.

Signatures of the Visible

By Fredric Jameson. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1990. $25.00 cloth; $15.95 paper (Dec. 1992).

Signatures of the Visible comprises the collected essays on film of Fredric Jameson, a critic and theorist of literature and culture who writes in the tradition of the Frankfurt School of Marxist critical theory. As a latter-day Frankfurter, Jameson's critical standpoint on film is determined by the school's historical understanding of the cinema as a symptom of consumer society and the commodification of culture. For Jameson, the commodification of culture decisively severed a newly constituted mass culture from older forms of popular culture and precipitated the separation of this mass culture from high art, which retreated into modernist self-reflexivity. Like Adorno, Jameson dogmatically refuses to entertain the idea that contemporary mass culture may be continuous with older forms of popular expression. "The commodity production of contemporary or mass culture," he writes, "has nothing whatsoever to do, and nothing in common with older forms of popular or folk art" (15). For Jameson, it is "utterly senseless" to suggest that film, like older forms of expression, might mediate between low and high culture, and to make a comparison, say, between the literature of Charles Dickens and the films of John Ford. For the relevant comparison can only be between contemporaneous forms of high and low culture, and in the era of mass culture the contemporaneous form of high culture has been modernism that has cast itself in opposition to mass culture.

Yet Jameson's work also marks a departure from or at least a development within the tradition of critical theory. In the early seventies essays, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" and "Class and Allegory in Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film," Jameson signals his refusal to privilege the aesthetics of modernist high culture, against which the products of mass culture would appear aesthetically degraded. At the same time, Jameson does not reject the discourse of aesthetic value in the name of an uncritical affirmation of mass culture in the kind of populist fashion that characterizes, say, the work of John Fiske, but rather because a discourse of aesthetic value inevitably pries the cultural artifact, be it modernist or mass cultural, from its social and economic determinations and effects. The discourse of value that replaces traditional aesthetics in Jameson's criticism resides in his reading of the texts of popular culture as an index of the possibility of social change and historical transformation, and hence an intimation of utopia—a world liberated from the reifying, privatizing effects of commodity exchange. For Jameson, films are not simply negative symptoms of their sociohistorial environment, they do not function simply as "empty distraction or mere false consciousness," for in order to manage the "social and political anxieties and fantasies" of their audience and provide them with an imaginary resolution, these dissatisfactions and the utopian yearnings which feed them must have an effective presence in the text (25).

In the later, eighties essays on "Magical Realism," *Diva, The Shining,* and the films of Syberberg, Jameson's critical method becomes grounded in the theory of postmodernity of which he had, meanwhile, become a leading theorist. Since postmodernity has been defined, among other things, precisely as the effacement of autonomous culture and the hierarchical distinctions between different cultural practices, what began as a methodological starting point intended to ground texts in their historical context appears to have been justified by history itself. But Jameson is not a postmodernist theorist like Jean Baudrillard, whose discourse tautologously reflects the loss of evaluative hierarchies and discriminations that it assumes to be the postmodern condition. Rather, Jameson is a theorist of the postmodern for whom postmodernity itself must be understood critically, that is, historically, as a symptom of the consumer society and multinational capitalism.

Postmodernism is perhaps most coherently conceived as an aesthetic category (in its putative collapse of cultural hierarchies, loss of evaluative distinctions, and its flattening out of history), albeit an aesthetics that has been transformed by its integration into everyday life. Thus it is not surprising that in the eighties essays, Jameson increasingly identifies the task of redeeming history with an attempt to write a "materialist" history of style. I doubt the coherence of this enterprise and Jameson's own efforts signal the problems, but what makes *Signatures of the Visible* so im-

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Postmodernism is perhaps most coherently conceived as an aesthetic category (in its putative collapse of cultural hierarchies, loss of evaluative distinctions, and its flattening out of history), albeit an aesthetics that has been transformed by its integration into everyday life. Thus it is not surprising that in the eighties essays, Jameson increasingly identifies the task of redeeming history with an attempt to write a "materialist" history of style. I doubt the coherence of this enterprise and Jameson's own efforts signal the problems, but what makes *Signatures of the Visible* so im-

portant for the student of film is the very fact that film history is the central focus of Jameson's concerns. The extremely complex and convoluted final essay of the volume, obscurely entitled "The Existence of Italy," and presumably written for the publication of the book, is an extended investigation into the relationship between realism, modernism, and postmodernism in film, which he seeks to understand as simultaneously historical and aesthetic categories.

The argument of this essay proceeds in three stages. First, Jameson attempts to restore the epistemological calm of realism to represent historical experience in the wake of modernism's rather ahistorical caricature of realism's claim to represent the real as a naïve illusion. Secondly, he tries to account for the modernist aesthetic of the fragment or the episode in relationship to the idea of modernism's autonomy from the social sphere. In this way, Jameson hopes to clarify the distinction between a historically specific kind of modernism and postmodernism's appropriation of modernist strategies to explode the very distinction between the real and its representation, and hence any truth claim of art. Finally, he explores further the aesthetic of postmodernism in film and its relationship to history. In particular, he develops a contrast between the high-tech, high-gloss color sheen of the European and American nostalgia film *(The Conformist, The Godfather)* and its televisual counterpoints ("Crime Story," "Miami Vice"), and the low-tech sleaze and shoddiness of the grade B conspiracy or punk film. Throughout, Jameson insists that it makes sense to see the relationship between realism, modernism, and postmodernism played out in the history of the twentieth-century medium of film, even though in other representational practices such as literature the historical time frame stretches back at least to the nineteenth century,

It seems to me that the underlying problem of Jameson's argument lies in his assumption that the aesthetics of a given film style can be satisfactorily explained by relating film to its social context. For example, it is undoubtedly important to understand the historical or ideological motivations of the heterogeneous forms of cinematic realism anatomized by Jameson—documentary, Hollywood, oppositional, and Bazinian—in terms of the social reality these forms of realist cinema represent, and Jameson's discussion of realism in the cinema is illuminating in this respect. However, does such an explanation do justice either to the stylistic specificity or the heterogeneity of the kinds of cinema which Jameson refers to? It seems to me that Marxist theories of art and cultural practice which route the explanation of style through economic and social processes inevitably end up simplifying the complexities involved in accounting for style and also the complexities of economic and social processes. Although it is obviously important to explain the ideological underpinnings of art works, the history of aesthetic forms cannot be reduced to the way they bear the traces of economic and social history without a sweepingly generalized and historically reductive understanding of style and a resolutely unempirical, figurative conception of "history." Writing of the "distance" between "part and whole, presence, and totality, style and plot" (are these the same thing?) in the aesthetic text (all texts?) that traditional interpretation sets out to overcome, Jameson declares his intention to reintroduce "history" into the problem "that 'distance' . . . is to be seen as an historical event: one which I am tempted—very hastily and prematurely, very dogmatically, if you prefer—to see as the scars and marks of social fragmentation and monadization" (101).

Jameson's writing displays all the narcissistic scholarly and writerly failings of his other mentor in critical theory, Jean-Paul Sartre. The overall "historical," that is, "totalizing" aspiration is so grand, the stakes are so high, that scruples of scholarship matter little, or at least less, and to raise them appears ungenerous, indeed gratuitous. Yet densely convoluted sentences and baroque paragraph structures which sheer off into indulgent, sometimes fanciful digressions require an enormous effort of will and tolerance, even for the initiated. They offer no concessions to the uninitiated. They are the hallmark of a writer with a grandiose sense of his mission, of the possibility and the place of criticism. Self-declarations of the provisional (even daring) character of imaginative and suggestive (yet too often unsubstantiated and sweeping) assertions do not constitute a justification, neither do they excuse the lack of critical examination which never comes as we move right on with our argument on the assumed truth of these assertions. Nevertheless, in spite of his rhetorical excesses and unexamined critical assumptions, Jameson is important for the study of film. For he brings to that activity a combination of skills too rare in an era of increasing specialization—a sensitivity to both history and aesthetics. The provocative, imaginative, and sometimes profound nature of his ideas lends a genuine intellectual dignity and worth to the activity of film criticism. I should add as a footnote that it is very frustrating not to be provided with the places and/or context of publication of these pieces, especially in view of Jameson's insistence on their occasional nature. Only dates of the essays are provided. RICHARD ALLEN

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Star Texts
Image and Performance in Film and Television

Edited by Jeremy G. Butler. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991. $39.95 cloth; $19.95 paper.

Jeremy Butler's anthology, *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*, is a promising addition to the developing area of performance studies. Butler offers introductory remarks to this collection of previously published essays, as well as a historical and critical contextualization of each piece. Butler is to be congratulated for directing attention to performance; attention that is as necessary as it is rare. The editor's remarks are solid, carefully written, and reasonably stated. The choice of articles or extracts are—as far as they go—well-made and judicious. (The striking exception is the excerpt from Bresson's *Notes on Cinematography*, which almost perversely manages to dodge the spiritual dimension of Bresson's writings.)

The structure of Butler's book is simple and revealing. The first section is entitled "Creating Performance: An Ongoing Debate," and juxtaposes ideas by theater and film practitioners regarding the creation of character. Stanislavsky, Strasberg, Brecht, and Kuleshov are among the figures represented here. The second and third parts of this volume are devoted to "Reading Performance, Reading Star Images" and "Studies of Individual Stars," which Butler characterizes as dealing with "issues *surrounding* the *reading* of performance texts and star images" (emphasis mine). The final chapter is "Stardom and Television: Tentative Beginnings," which sustains the critical impetus of parts 2 and 3, but turns its eye toward television.

The structure is revealing: the initial section dealing with "creation" accounts for less than a quarter of the book's material. Of that quarter, less than 35 pages are devoted to purveyors of so-called naturalistic acting. The remainder of the volume is not about *reading* performance (as Butler insists), but about issues *surrounding* the reading. As is the case with most work on film acting, this book all too rarely concerns itself with what the actor is *doing*, with performance as a creative process. Its interest circulates around the ideological web that creates and enmeshes the star; it deals (or wishes to deal) with what Noël Carroll would call a "Psycho-Semiotic-Marxist" interpretation of the meaning of performance. *Star Texts* is oblivious to the myriad powerful, compelling, and complex issues that invite, provoke, and demand a *reading* of performance. (The omission of Stanley Cavell and William Rothman's writings on acting from this collection is telling.)

The essays that Butler finds particularly engaging are informed by two basic notions that also clearly color his own thinking about performance. First, Butler wants nothing less than "a global theory of screen performance." How a totalizing, top-down theory of film performance might be achieved, or what that theory might claim, remains a mystery. The single explanatory model in film theory seems particularly inappropriate to the multiplicity of performance styles and wide-ranging issues that complicate the reading of any performance (e.g., national styles, historical styles, authorship, notions of theatricality, etc., etc.) in cinema's short history. And such a theory—in its impulse toward reduction—would need to diminish or evade the much longer history of acting styles in theater history that have impacted on film acting. Second, the actor-as-construct notion is built on a foundational idea in much contemporary film theory—that selfhood is illusory. To assert such an idea either in relation to the actor or the spectator's response to the actor circumvents the very elements that make acting such a strong and difficult subject to articulate. When notions of individuality, feeling, and personal expression are deliberately suppressed and denied, discussions of performance are anemic at best, profoundly misguided and uncomprehending of the process of acting at worst. One need only circumnavigate the murky waters of Barry King's "Articulating Stardom" to witness a quest to deny, at whatever cost to credibility and logic, that an actor can be a creative individual, responsible in any way for the consciousness we view in the screen.

Butler reprimands essays that fall short of political correctness. Charles Affron's ruminative, highly speculative "Generous Stars" is criticized for its failure to offer psychoanalytic-semiotic explanations; Charles Eckert's ground-breaking essay, "Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller," is chided for its "rudimentary use of Freud and Marx"; while James Damico's "Ingrid from Lorraine to Stromboli: Analyzing the Public's Perception of a Film Star," is censured for omitting an account of the "subject-viewer's positioning by the text." The inclusion of these works in *Star Texts* is laudable. But Butler denigrates these essays for their imperfect conformity to a particular set of theoretical precepts (which, moreover, achieved currency well after the first appearance of these writings) while slighting their abundant strengths.

Butler also fails to dispel some of the more flagrant and tiresome canards about Method acting. In James Naremore's article, "The Performance Frame," he (Naremore) writes: ". . . and in America the most celebrated postwar theater actors were actually schooled to perform themselves." The idea of "playing oneself" represents the ultimate misreading of the goals and

principles of Method training. Moreover, it trivializes the emotional dimension of human experience by suggesting that the comprehension of an individuality is a paltry objective.

In a section on the Method in his essay "Film Acting and Independent Cinema," Andrew Higson writes, ". . . the attempt to 'portray reality' is blocked by the imprecision, irrelevancy and distraction of naturalism's trivial verisimilitude." Stanislavsky would surely be amazed by Higson's arrogant derogation of naturalism. The Russian teacher/director/theoretician continually admonished his students to remember that their task was not a re-creation, but a *poetic manifestation* of reality. And it is this poetic aspect of performance that is misunderstood so deeply by the "anti-illusionists" Butler champions.

Finally, in reflecting on one of the most puzzling aspects of this collection, we return to the title, *Star Texts*. One would imagine, in perusing the text, that there are no contemporary stars, and certainly none who are also Method actors. The innovative acting style pioneered by Stanislavsky (and manifest over the last two decades in figures such as De Niro, Hackman, Hoffman, Pacino, and Streep) is completely disregarded. It is essential that a contemporary text on stardom explicate the ways in which the Method has been indelibly mapped onto modern American film culture. The meaning of stardom has changed radically since the 1950s; we need to examine how and why. As it stands, Butler's collection perpetuates the myth that when we write about stars, we are engaged in a discourse about the past.

CAROLE ZUCKER

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Still in Movement
Shakespeare on Screen

By Lorne M. Buchman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. $24.95.

The Shakespeare film is a genre of film adaptation now accompanied by a distinct category of criticism that has generally come from academics trained in the literary analysis of Shakespeare texts. Lorne Buchman, a professor of dramatic arts, aims to break the mold of a textual approach to the Shakespeare film through a consideration of the performance of the plays as a function of cinema's unique properties of space and time. His interest lies in how plays on screen activate a particular imaginative response as the result of cinematic technique. In developing this approach, *Still in Movement* isolates sequences in a select number of works to explore the evidence of a new relationship among elements in the Shakespeare play created through film adaptation. For the most part, this emphasis sets aside issues of the director/auteur's idiosyncratic interpretation of the literary material as well as issues of the cultural, political, and historical context of the film work.

The filmic properties given particular attention in *Still in Movement* are the dynamics of mise-en-scène, the multiple perspectives on dramatic action through camera and editing, the spatial field and dramaturgy of the close-up, the plastic organization of time, and the reflexive acknowledgment of the medium and of the differential between theater and film in some adaptations. The book's stated principle of selection is to examine films by directors whose work is most innovative in the uses of the medium's spatial and temporal resources. Its pantheon of Shakespeare directors is Peter Brook, Grigori Kozintsev, Laurence Olivier, Roman Polanski, and Orson Welles. While Tony Richardson is also briefly discussed, there is no mention whatsoever of Akira Kurosawa or Kenneth Branagh. The Shakespeare plays selected are all tragedies and histories—the absence of comedies could explain the exclusion of Peter Hall and Max Reinhardt.

Irrespective of many references to Russian Formalism, Eisenstein's montage dialectics, Brecht's alienation-effect, and Bazin's realism, the book derives its operative concept of film form from art historian Erwin Panofsky's observations on the medium's spatialization of time and dynamization of space. However, *Still in Movement* reveals only a tenuous grasp of film theory, as is evident by an initial claim that much of Eisenstein's film theory is based in Meyerhold's theater principles (8). The book's framework for the viewer's experience of Shakespeare performed on film is based in phenomenology. Its specific sources are the reader response theory of Wolfgang Iser and the "poetics of space" of Gaston Bachelard. No use is made of the phenomenology of visual media as theorized by Merleau-Ponty or as applied to film by Edgar Morin, Vivian Sobchack, and others.

The important critical literature on film spectatorship is also largely disregarded in this study. Its close analyses easily and frequently adopt the assumption of a complete correspondence between spectator and film character. The extreme of such identification comes when Buchman claims that the viewer of Kozintsev's *King Lear* temporarily assumes the gods' point of view (55). The book pairs this axis of complete subjectivity with one of absolute objectivity, where perspective is

principles of Method training. Moreover, it trivializes the emotional dimension of human experience by suggesting that the comprehension of an individuality is a paltry objective.

In a section on the Method in his essay "Film Acting and Independent Cinema," Andrew Higson writes, ". . . the attempt to 'portray reality' is blocked by the imprecision, irrelevancy and distraction of naturalism's trivial verisimilitude." Stanislavsky would surely be amazed by Higson's arrogant derogation of naturalism. The Russian teacher/director/theoretician continually admonished his students to remember that their task was not a re-creation, but a *poetic manifestation* of reality. And it is this poetic aspect of performance that is misunderstood so deeply by the "anti-illusionists" Butler champions.

Finally, in reflecting on one of the most puzzling aspects of this collection, we return to the title, *Star Texts*. One would imagine, in perusing the text, that there are no contemporary stars, and certainly none who are also Method actors. The innovative acting style pioneered by Stanislavsky (and manifest over the last two decades in figures such as De Niro, Hackman, Hoffman, Pacino, and Streep) is completely disregarded. It is essential that a contemporary text on stardom explicate the ways in which the Method has been indelibly mapped onto modern American film culture. The meaning of stardom has changed radically since the 1950s; we need to examine how and why. As it stands, Butler's collection perpetuates the myth that when we write about stars, we are engaged in a discourse about the past.

CAROLE ZUCKER

▪ Carole Zucker teaches at Concordia University.

Still in Movement
Shakespeare on Screen

By Lorne M. Buchman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. $24.95.

The Shakespeare film is a genre of film adaptation now accompanied by a distinct category of criticism that has generally come from academics trained in the literary analysis of Shakespeare texts. Lorne Buchman, a professor of dramatic arts, aims to break the mold of a textual approach to the Shakespeare film through a consideration of the performance of the plays as a function of cinema's unique properties of space and time. His interest lies in how plays on screen activate a particular imaginative response as the result of cinematic technique. In developing this approach, *Still in Movement* isolates sequences in a select number of works to explore the evidence of a new relationship among elements in the Shakespeare play created through film adaptation. For the most part, this emphasis sets aside issues of the director/auteur's idiosyncratic interpretation of the literary material as well as issues of the cultural, political, and historical context of the film work.

The filmic properties given particular attention in *Still in Movement* are the dynamics of mise-en-scène, the multiple perspectives on dramatic action through camera and editing, the spatial field and dramaturgy of the close-up, the plastic organization of time, and the reflexive acknowledgment of the medium and of the differential between theater and film in some adaptations. The book's stated principle of selection is to examine films by directors whose work is most innovative in the uses of the medium's spatial and temporal resources. Its pantheon of Shakespeare directors is Peter Brook, Grigori Kozintsev, Laurence Olivier, Roman Polanski, and Orson Welles. While Tony Richardson is also briefly discussed, there is no mention whatsoever of Akira Kurosawa or Kenneth Branagh. The Shakespeare plays selected are all tragedies and histories—the absence of comedies could explain the exclusion of Peter Hall and Max Reinhardt.

Irrespective of many references to Russian Formalism, Eisenstein's montage dialectics, Brecht's alienation-effect, and Bazin's realism, the book derives its operative concept of film form from art historian Erwin Panofsky's observations on the medium's spatialization of time and dynamization of space. However, *Still in Movement* reveals only a tenuous grasp of film theory, as is evident by an initial claim that much of Eisenstein's film theory is based in Meyerhold's theater principles (8). The book's framework for the viewer's experience of Shakespeare performed on film is based in phenomenology. Its specific sources are the reader response theory of Wolfgang Iser and the "poetics of space" of Gaston Bachelard. No use is made of the phenomenology of visual media as theorized by Merleau-Ponty or as applied to film by Edgar Morin, Vivian Sobchack, and others.

The important critical literature on film spectatorship is also largely disregarded in this study. Its close analyses easily and frequently adopt the assumption of a complete correspondence between spectator and film character. The extreme of such identification comes when Buchman claims that the viewer of Kozintsev's *King Lear* temporarily assumes the gods' point of view (55). The book pairs this axis of complete subjectivity with one of absolute objectivity, where perspective is

external and normal. This paradigm of film structure largely ignores the mediation of film codes and filmic conventions. By now it is commonplace in film analysis to consider the point-of-view shot an imaginary and symbolic register of meaning rather than a perspective on reality itself.

The most illuminating discussions in *Still in Movement* are of the *Hamlet* and *King Lear* films directed by Grigori Kozintsev, who has left eloquent published accounts of his thoughts on Shakespeare and of his own artistic principles. In accounting for their Soviet context, Buchman claims that with his Shakespeare adaptations Kozintsev, "as a student of Eisenstein, . . . uses the film medium to aestheticize Marx's concept of dialectical materialism" (45). The claim is misleading in several respects. Dialectical materialism derives not from Marx but from the late writings of Engels, and it is advanced as a Marxist truth by Soviet culture under Stalin. In light of his background in the Factory of the Eccentric Actor (FEKS) and his long collaboration with the writer-director Leonid Trauberg, Kozintsev cannot be simply identified as follower of Eisenstein. For his part, Kozintsev offers a far more relevant reference to Marx in his book *King Lear: The Space of Tragedy*, where he cites the historiographical insight made in *The 18th Brumaire* that tragedy, when repeated, becomes farce. The director correlates the carnivalesque inversions in both the play and his film to this pattern of historical repetition.

Prefacing the book's discussion of the heath scene in Peter Brook's *King Lear*—whose construction through rapid montage and expressionistic compositions is a patent artifice—is a confident assertion that "the film medium has the capacity to create a real storm, with real wind, rain, and thunder" (53). A variant of pathetic fallacy is evident here in the assumed interpenetration of nature and the apparatus. In such passages the limitations in Buchman's effort to establish a phenomenological account of these films become apparent. The detailed analyses of key moments on-screen, undertaken in lieu of a comprehensive account of each individual film, do nevertheless provide several rewarding results. Buchman makes a contribution to the study of Shakespeare on film through his exploration of the varied possibilities of the close-up as a performance space to portray the psychological dynamics of character. Developing Brecht's idea of the social gest on stage, the discussion of Olivier's *Richard III* expands upon a momentary shot of Richard leaning toward Anne as she kneels in mourning over the open casket that contains her dead husband, Edward. In the course of this discussion, each strand among the knotted implications of intimacy and complicity and of personality and politics in the tableau is deftly unraveled. Unfortunately, for film sequences where the critical analysis is nuanced, layered, and insightful, the book's illustrations are often stock production stills or frame enlargements of very poor quality apparently taken from a video monitor.

Buchman's consideration of mise-en-scène and editing also contains many perceptive remarks on the dynamics of alternation between the vast intimate space of a close-up and the potential intimacy of a vast exterior depicted in a long shot. Another area where the book yields a deeper understanding of the Shakespeare film is that of audiovisual montage, as in Welles' *Othello*. Voice-over narration for the delivery of a soliloquy, with the environment and behavior of characters provided as a context for the poetic imagery, adds a further dimension of contemplative action to the drama. While *Still in Movement* does not fulfill its larger claims as a phenomenological account of film structure, it often succeeds in unfolding the discrete yet multiple meanings within dramatic moments segmented from important Shakespeare films.

JAMES GOODWIN

▪ James Goodwin teaches in the English Department at UCLA.

The Warrior's Camera
The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa

By Stephen Prince. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. $39.50 cloth; $14.95 paper.

In this intense, ambitious study Stephen Prince argues that the "central problematic of Kurosawa's work . . . is to find a method for constructing a viable political cinema that is, at the same time, popular" (xix). Like many other critics, Prince finds Kurosawa's most distinctive visual style to be a deeply formalistic one characterized by jagged editing, aggressive transitional wipes, dynamic use of composition, movement, and lenses, and unique understanding of cinematic space. It is this style that Kurosawa developed in order to address the social, cultural, and political problems of Japan, beginning with postwar reconstruction.

Focusing on Kurosawa's career through *Ran* (1985), Prince traces the director's efforts to create a political cinema from its origins to its eventual defeat and dissolution. To this end he skillfully draws on Kurosawa scholarship, Japanese history, cultural study,

external and normal. This paradigm of film structure largely ignores the mediation of film codes and filmic conventions. By now it is commonplace in film analysis to consider the point-of-view shot an imaginary and symbolic register of meaning rather than a perspective on reality itself.

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Focusing on Kurosawa's career through *Ran* (1985), Prince traces the director's efforts to create a political cinema from its origins to its eventual defeat and dissolution. To this end he skillfully draws on Kurosawa scholarship, Japanese history, cultural study,

film aesthetics, and Kurosawa's autobiography. Of the wide variety of topics that Price covers—among them, the relationship of Kurosawa's samurai films to the American Western and the ideological implications of Kurosawa's use of wide screen, long lenses, and multi-camera filming—none arguably is more important than Kurosawa's notion of individualism. For it is this notion that lies at the heart of his political project.

After the war Kurosawa came to believe that Japan's spiritual and economic recovery depended upon the adoption of social values that promoted the autonomous self. This belief was shaped not only by Western-style individualism (and Occupation-motivated reforms) but by the ideals of samurai codes of conduct and by the Japanese sense of dedication to the human community. Therefore, in *Drunken Angel* (1948) and *Stray Dog* (1949), Kurosawa focused on the extraordinary exploits of individuals committed to serving humanity. Yet, by structuralizing his narrative on individual heroism in these two films, he tended to locate destiny in the self and to disrupt the very reforms he meant to promote. As Prince explains, "The problem was to find a space where the individual could stand that would not entail a blindness to the social world and collapse into selfishness or solipism" (112). This problem is even more evident in *Record of a Living Being* (1955) and *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960), where Kurosawa's examination of broad social issues—the atomic bomb (i.e., the nuclear state) and corporate corruption respectively—is displaced on the family and ethical problems of the chief protagonists. In short, Kurosawa's social analysis and political inquiries were impeded by his failure to rethink or rework his formal structures.

Prince argues that what Kurosawa needed to develop and sustain was a "dialectical self-awareness" (291) that might include any or all of the following: shifting levels of perspective, nonlinear narrative, and self-reflexive elements and strategies. Given this view, it is not surprising that Prince regards *Ikiru* (1952), *Yojimbo* (1961), and *High and Low* (1963), Kurosawa's most self-reflexive and dialectically self-aware films, as exemplary models of his political cinema. In *Ikiru* Kurosawa deploys shifting points of view and an unconventional structure to analyze the cultural spaces that separate the dying protagonist from the rest of society. In *Yojimbo* Kurosawa adopts a deliberately self-conscious presentation of Mifune's character to create a fantasy about how history should have turned out. Finally, in *High and Low* Kurosawa not only uses a bifurcated structure to replicate and explore the worlds of poverty and wealth, he also pays self-reflexive attention to technologies of surveillance, reflecting surfaces, and images of perception in order to foreground "the acts of seeing and the social knowledge they imply" (188). As Prince points out, Kurosawa never actually adopted the radicalized forms of Brecht and modernist film-makers like Oshima—not even in the films mentioned above. Nevertheless, he is "implicitly Brechtian" (250), according to Prince, even though his work is not marked by consistent formal self-reflexivity.

However, beginning with *Red Beard* (1965), Kurosawa's cinema underwent a major thematic and stylistic change. Having lost faith in Japan and its ability to reform, as well as in the power of the artist to compel such change, Kurosawa renounced his political commitment and—for the first time—views poverty and suffering as spiritual problems, not social ones. He therefore retreats into what Prince calls "mythical spaces" (249), where he watches the world from a distance. His style changes accordingly: exhuberant, dynamic formalism is now replaced by an aesthetic of restraint and meditation, one characterized by authorial detachment, static character groupings, and long takes.

This ideological and stylistic retreat continues in *Dodeskaden* (1970) and *Dersu Uzala* (1975) until, in *Kagemusha* (1980) and *Ran* (1985), "What was once a materialist cinema and program of reform has become instead a transcendental lament" (289). Indeed, in these last two films the prospects for human freedom and individuality are extinguished; the tone is one of unremitting coldness, bitterness, and despair. In explaining the complex reasons for Kurosawa's deepening pessimism, Prince offers this perceptive observation:

> Kurosawa was an artist of crisis, and as the moment of historical rupture that gave form to his work subsided, as traditional social groupings reconstituted themselves in newly contemporary forms, the cultural ground on which his work had been built began to shift. It was like trying to rebuild after an earthquake only to find the structures you had erected skewed and deformed by yet another seismic shift. (283–84)

The Warrior's Camera is not only a thoughtful, stimulating, and rigorous study but also a major addition to both Kurosawa and Japanese film scholarship. Its examination of the intersection of self, culture, and history is meticulously done; its extended close analysis of individual films, especially *Ikiru, Yojimbo, High and Low,* and *Red Beard,* is superbly confident.

To be sure, it has shortcomings. First, Prince is unduly harsh on *Rashomon* (1950), which he regards as a flawed attempt at modernist cinema because it "deals with fragmentation and relativity in terms of the *content* of the narratives, not their structure" (135; italics included). Second, *No Regrets for Our Youth* (1946)

warrants a much fuller analysis than he gives it. True, "the film is without the formal energy of [Kurosawa's] best work" (78). But so too are the late films which he feels compelled to examine in detail. More to the point, *No Regrets* is the only Kurosawa film with an idealistic, socially committed woman as its protagonist and a visual style dominated by close-ups, flashbacks, and expressionistic techniques to serve that protagonist—a style that offers an instructive contrast to Kurosawa's signature style.

Third, and most important, Prince's examination of Kurosawa's self-reflexivity is incomplete. Prince sees Kurosawa as occupying a position somewhere between traditionalist film-makers (Ozu, Mizoguchi) and modernist ones (like Oshima). This notion is intriguing, but as Prince surely knows, overt foregrounding of narrational and visual strategies is a characteristic not only of modernism but of traditional Japanese art. Indeed, he even briefly discusses "commingly," in which pictorial and narrative forms are joined "in support of each other, in counterpoint, or as commentary on the other" (134). I am not trying to deny the possibility that Kurosawa's self-reflexive style is influenced by modernism, rather I am arguing that Prince should have explored the influence of Japanese tradition on this style.

The Warrior's Camera was already published by the time *Rhapsody in August* (1991), Kurosawa's latest film, was released. But *Dreams* (1990) opened in Japan just as the book was going to press, so Prince at least had the opportunity to make this observation about it: "Kurosawa has returned to the dreamworld and imperatives of fantasy. . . . A return to the heroic tradition and the social commitment that underlay it seems unlikely." (290). Prince's feeling of disappointment here is unmistakable, and one can only wonder whether *Rhapsody in August* will alter this feeling in any way. One thing, however, is certain: Kurosawa has created an extraordinary body of work, and Prince—empowered by love and admiration for this legendary director—has written a study that leads to a deeper appreciation of it.

ARTHUR NOLLETTI, JR.

▪ Arthur Nolletti, Jr., teaches at Framingham State College in Massachusetts.

The Women's Companion to International Film

Edited by Annette Kuhn with Susannah Radstone. London: Virago Press, 1990. £14.99. Published in the U.S. as *Women in Film: An International Guide*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1991. $12.95.

Although certain attributes of this book—primarily the trivia questions scattered throughout the text—make it seem targeted at the casual film buff rather than the academic scholar, the breadth of its coverage, the novel perspective it brings to that material, and its high research and production standards make it a major addition to film scholarship.

Conceived in 1986 and developed consciously "in the tradition of the reference book" (*viii*), the *Companion* contains alphabetical entries ranging from "Aboriginal Film and Video" to "Zetterling, Mai (1925-)." It offers approximately 600 entries by 79 contributors, including journal editors, festival organizers, university instructors, and film-/video-makers—people like Kay Armatage, Pam Cook, E. Ann Kaplan, Jane Root, and Janet Staiger, plus an international list of names less known to U.S. readers. Along the way, the *Companion* also provides filmographies, bibliographies, and biographies, as well as illustrations and cross-references. One improvement in the U.S. edition is the addition of a more comprehensive general index.

Perhaps contrary to expectations, the *Companion* does not focus exclusively on individual women associated with film (and there are of course idiosyncratic choices about who does get coverage—an entry for Susan Sontag but not for Nelly Kaplan, for example). Instead, it emphasizes contemporary and international production, usually through entries on the national cinemas, and it does not provide the coverage of "women's 'lost' contributions" that the U.S. edition promises.

On the other hand, the *Companion* provides more information about male involvement in film production than one might expect. Here, though, the *Companion's* feminist perspective provides unique interest. For instance, the entry on Ingmar Bergman clarifies his appeal by placing his critical reception within a historical context in which his thematic use of female protagonists seemed extraordinary.

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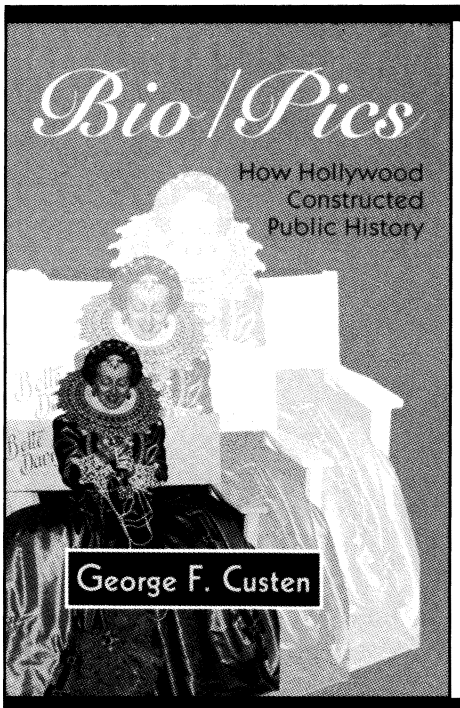
Like *A Feminist Dictionary*, the *Companion* fills a need for reference material helpful to those who wish to appreciate the impact of contemporary women's

movement research and activities on academic areas of study as well as on daily life and language. The Preface acknowledges "the aim" of making difficult material accessible to a general audience. Unlike *A Feminist Dictionary*, whose entries are frequently successful compilations of appropriate quotations, the *Companion*'s entries are original work attributable to individual authors. Its entries on feminist film theory and its general treatment of conceptual material are clear and short. Its brief bibliographical references at the end of each study adequately refer readers to the appropriate starting point for further study.

The *Companion* is, in other words, appropriate for a broad audience in a wide range of situations. As an antidote to the sort of dictionary in which "B" might stand for "Breasts" and "Brigitte Bardot" (with a "witty" connection made between the two) that I once found in a late-fifties issue of one of the more flippantly chauvinistic French film magazines, *The Women's Companion to International Film* is long overdue.

HARRIET MARGOLIS

▪ Harriet Margolis teaches at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan.



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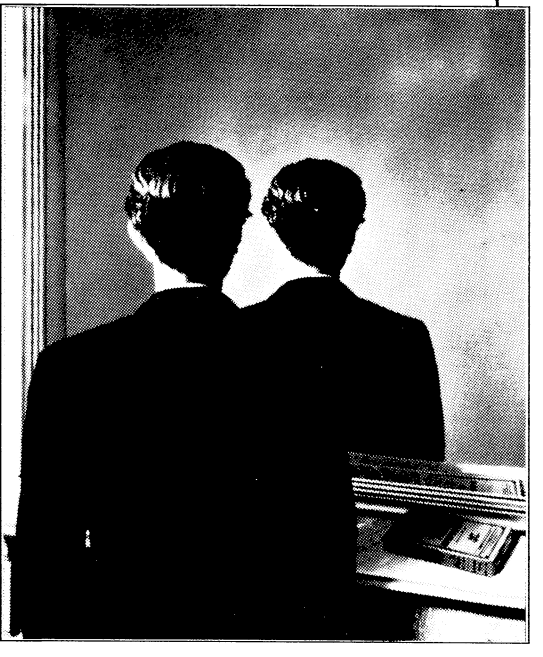

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